

# An Igbo Civilization

## Nri Kingdom & Hegemony



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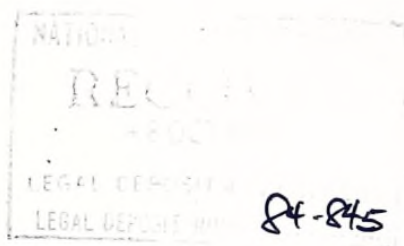
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# An Igbo Civilization

## *Nri Kingdom & Hegemony*

M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu, BA, MPhil, PhD  
*Professor of Social Anthropology,  
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Ethnographica, London

Ethiope Publishing Corporation

1981

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*Dedicated to*  
*Eze Nri Nrijiofo II*  
*1891-1979*  
*The Regent: Prince Ruben Tabansi*  
*(Orinmili)*  
*Tabansi Motor's Limited, Onitsha*  
*Institute of African Studies*  
*University of Ibadan*  
*Professor Billy Dudley (Nigeria)*  
*Professor T. Shaw (U.K.)*  
*Professor D. Forde (U.K.)*  
*Professor K.O. Dike (Nigeria)*  
*All informants named in this book*  
*My wife Onyetugo*

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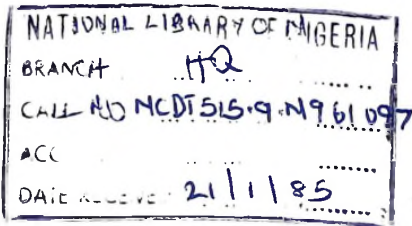
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*Note on Orthography:*

*Tones have not been marked but it should be borne in mind that Igbo is a tone language.*

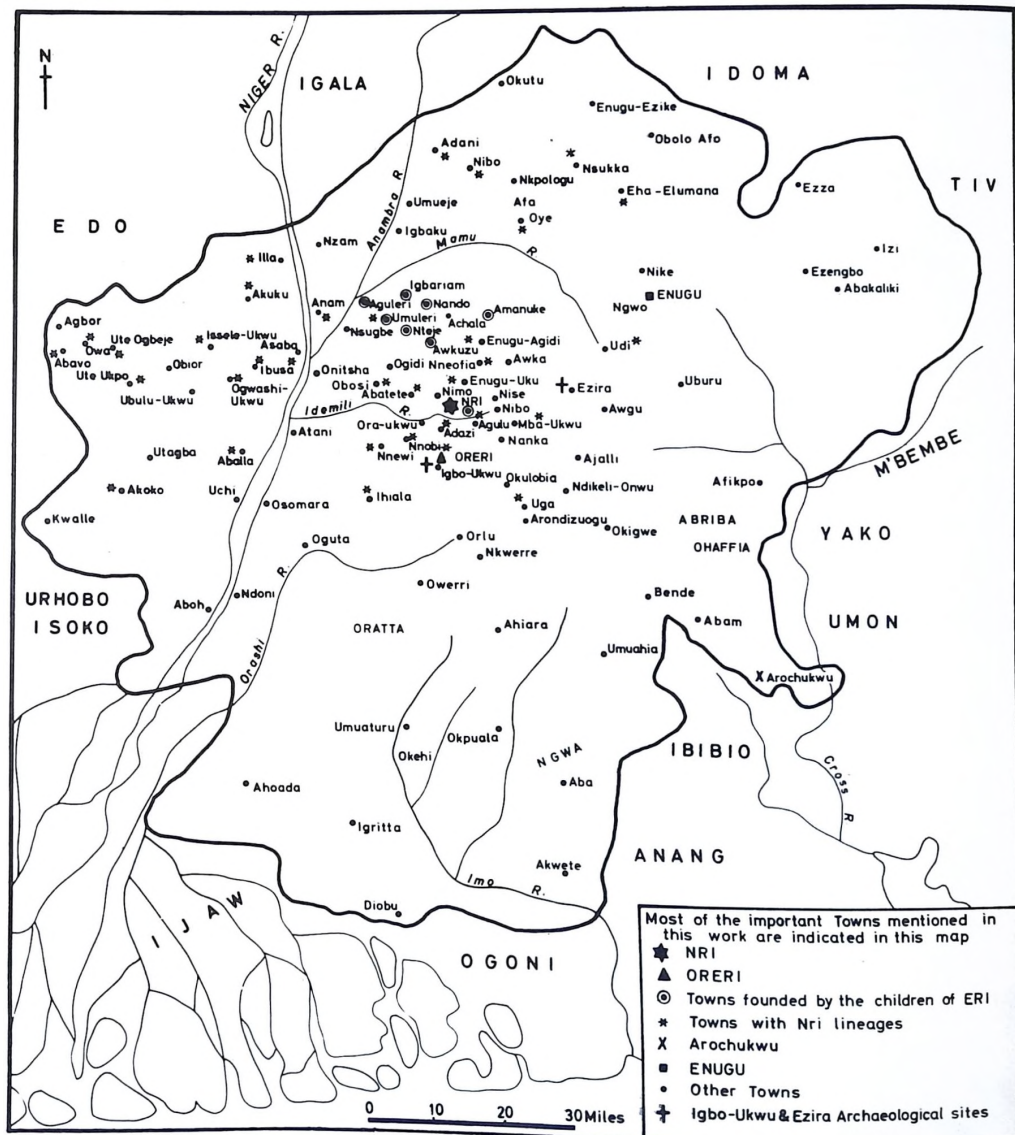
# Preface

This book is a slightly modified form of my Master of Philosophy Thesis, University College London, London University, 1974, which was recommended for publication. Economic considerations prevented certain publishers based in the United Kingdom and operating in Nigeria from publishing it. A Nigerian philanthropist, Prince Ruben Tabansi, through Tabansi Motors Limited, made funds available to the University of Benin for its publication and I am grateful to both Ethnographica, London and Ethiope Publishing Corporation, Benin City, Nigeria, for the good job they have done.

Problems raised in the text are explained in the footnotes which, in my opinion, are very important and should be considered as an integral part of this work. The book places emphasis on the diachronic and synchronic study of Nri culture and its civilization. I should be held responsible for any factual errors.

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University of Benin  
Benin City, Nigeria.  
1980

Map 1. Towns in the Igbo Culture Area.



# Introduction

## Background

In 1959 to 1960 and 1964, Professor Thurstan Shaw conducted an archaeological excavation at Igbo-ukwu, Eastern Nigeria, Western Africa, near the town of Oteri which was a Nri settlement. The report of this excavation is now fully published in two volumes.<sup>1</sup>

The quality and quantity of the bronzes, iron objects, pottery and beads, and the general character and condition of the finds indicate that they might have been used, if not made, by peoples organized in a fairly complex society. Indeed the metallic analysis and the study of the workmanship and style of the Igbo-ukwu bronze objects indicate that they are unlike those of Benin and Ife, but they generally belong to a West African bronze complex.

One of the most striking aspects of these objects is their antiquity, dated ninth century A.D. by the radio-carbon method (Appendix 5). It is at present considered that they are the only bronze objects of such antiquity archaeologically excavated in Western Africa. The Ife, Benin and Jebba bronzes were surface finds.<sup>2</sup>

The Igbo-ukwu objects were not isolated finds in the Igbo culture area. Some fifteen miles east of Igbo-ukwu, at Ezira, which was also within the sphere of Nri influence, Professor D. Hartle recovered some thirty pieces of bronze objects including anklets, bracelets, bells, etc. These objects seem to be in the main part similar to the Igbo-ukwu bronzes. They have been dated by radio-carbon as late fifteenth century A.D., and this date correlates with the latest date from the Igbo-ukwu site.<sup>3</sup>

From the outset it was obvious that certain symbolic motifs depicted on the Igbo-ukwu objects, such as the elaborate facial marks called *ichi* on the bronze pendant head and the cords round the

anklets of the figures of a man and a woman depicted on the cylindrical bronze objects, are at present associated with the *ozo*-titled men who are the political and ritual leaders of their community in Nri and Oteri and Igbo-ukwu towns. It was therefore decided to undertake a close study of the extant cultures of the area.<sup>4</sup>

I was appointed by the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, to study the extant cultures of the area in order to find out if there are any cultural relationships between the cultures depicted on the objects or represented by the objects and the present cultures of the area. After two pilot surveys, I decided to base myself at Nri town and study its culture and the cultures of the surrounding towns in detail.<sup>5</sup>

This work, therefore, arises from part of my field work research done at Nri town, where I lived and worked for about thirty-five months. During this period I spent twenty-six months studying Nri culture and other cultures around Oteri and Igbo-ukwu. I also spent four months visiting and studying other Igbo towns associated with Nri. My last five months in Nri were spent establishing a museum there. The field work periods were as follows: October 1966 to February 1968, September 1970 to April 1972. Since I speak a dialect of Igbo language I did not experience any linguistic difficulties, although my work was interrupted by the Nigerian civil war and by the delays in administrative arrangements at Ibadan University.

In 1972, during the later part of my work at Nri, as part of my job, I established a public museum at Nri. There, I displayed and stored about five hundred material objects collected from Nri town and other Igbo towns. The striking aspect of these collections, which included bronzes, iron, wood, beads, ivory and pottery, is that some of them are of considerable age. They seem stylistically similar



in many respects to the excavated objects of both Professors Shaw and Hartle. In spite of the similarities in form and symbolic motifs, there is an obvious decline in both the quantity and quality of the bronze objects collected. The significance of this in reconstructing the political and economic decline of Nri will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

### Source Material

#### *Anthropological study based on empirical observation.*

This is the most important source, because it is based on observations of the behaviour patterns of the Nri people.

#### *Oral traditions and genealogical structures*

In reconstructing the past political history of Nri beyond the twentieth century, I have partly relied on Nri genealogical models and the oral traditions associated with them and partly on the oral traditions collected from other Igbo towns claiming connections, directly or indirectly, with Nri.

These traditions were cross-checked and cross-examined by determining their significance and relevance in terms of the people's behaviour patterns and their institutions, by referring to other versions that are known or recorded, and by using data derived from archaeology, the distribution of material culture and other non-material culture complexes that occur in the Igbo culture.

#### *Other documentary sources*

Five types of documentary sources are generally referred to in this work. I shall discuss them in their chronological order, pointing out their scope and limitations.

(a) The earliest reports made by early writers who lived in Igbo land or visited the Bight of Biafra or Igbo land in between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The reports are scanty but in most cases helpful in filling the gap in the absence of ethnographic materials. Such reporters were Duarte Pacheco Pereira (sixteenth century), Barbot (1746), Olaudah Equiano (1789), Captain John Adam (1823) and W.B. Baikie (1854).

(b) Anthropological reports of sociologists and government anthropologists who worked in Igbo land between 1895 and 1934.

These were made by Major Leonard (1906), Northcote Thomas (1913), P.A. Talbot (1926), C.K. Meek (1931) and M.D.W. Jeffreys (1934).

There are three main limitations in using these reports. Firstly, they are mainly records of what they were told about Nri. Secondly, the anthropologists generally stayed only a few days at Nri and then left because their assignments were to make a survey report on some general issues. Thirdly, later anthropologists like Meek and Jeffreys not only worked twenty years after the British had banned the practice of Nri ritual and political activities in Igbo land but also during the interregnum of Eze Nri Obalike, who died in 1927. For example, M.D.W. Jeffreys, who wrote copiously on the ritual of Eze Nri, briefly saw an Eze Nri at Oteri and none at Nri. His work on Nri was based mainly on what he was told and, furthermore, he did not stay more than a few days in both Nri and Oteri towns. It is therefore not surprising that his report is a medley of both Nri and Oteri systems. On the whole, some parts of these reports are useful as cross-checks and for the study of the dynamic processes of certain aspects of Nri culture, especially the reports of Major Leonard and Northcote Thomas.

(c) The reports made by early missionaries such as the Rev. Father Duhaze in 1906<sup>6</sup> and G.T. Basden, 1922. Although they display the usual Christian bias against the so-called pagan religion, they are useful indicators for finding out the role that missionaries played in destroying the traditional influence of Nri in Igbo land.

(d) The intelligence reports on Nri and other neighbouring towns, written by the British administrative officers between 1910 and 1934, are another important documentary source.

Since most of these reports were written after the death of Eze Nri Obalike in 1927 and about nineteen years after the ban on Nri activities, not much was reported about the nature of the Nri political system. The reports recorded in the field note books by most of the junior officers, that is the Assistant District Officers, seem more detailed and factual. But these reports were never sent to the senior officers. They were deposited in the divisional office at Awka. Instead, a different draft was made and sent to the senior officers. The facts in these new drafts tend to confirm the ideas formerly held by the senior officers and to contradict the reports in the original field notes, so these intelligence reports should be used with great care. The original field notes of these junior officers are much more useful.

(e) Reports by indigenous writers, who began to record the history and culture of their area between 1924 and 1960. Such reports are very useful for cross-checking the extent of Nri influence and for validating the claims made by Nri people. In using them caution has to be exercised, because most of them are coloured by the political ambition of the new élite who wrote them and the general tendency of the writers to minimize the effects of past local external influences on their towns. Some of the most useful ones were written by I.E. Iwekanuno (English translation by F. Thomas), 1924; D.C. Ugwu, 1958; M.C.M. Idigo, 1955; E.O. Ilozue, 1972; I.C.K. Anadi; 1967; M.O. Ogah, 1970, and A.E. Iduwe, 1970.

#### *Archaeological and ethnographical material culture*

Archaeological and ethnographical material culture cannot speak for themselves. But a voice can be given to them if systematically handled. This is done in Chapter 9, where I have considered the nature of the long-term changes that took place in the Nri political system in the light of evidence deduced from oral traditions, genealogical models, documentary evidence, archaeological and ethnographic material culture and, above all, from the social anthropological studies of Nri and other relevant towns. (See Appendix 2.)

#### **The Problems and Scope of this Study**

This work deals with two main sets of inter-related problems – the particular and the general – which are central in the study of Nri political organization as a sub-system in the total Igbo culture.

##### *The particular problems*

The particular problems considered are as follows:

- (a) How does a political system based on segmentary lineages with hundreds of *ozo*-titled men as leaders of the lineages, and with a sacred king as the head of the state, cope with the problems of the allocation, distribution and exercise of political power and authority, without resort to the use of physical force characteristic of militarized states?
- (b) What are the main characteristics of corporate political groupings in Nri and to what extent are their formation, continuity and autonomy based on kinship and non-kinship factors?
- (c) What are the nature and character of political actions generated by these groupings and why is segmentary opposition a rare phenomenon?

(d) There was a conspicuous absence of militarism and the use of physical force in Nri political organization, and yet Nri exercised some degree of ritual and political ascendancy over a considerable number of Igbo villages in the northern portion of the Igbo culture area. What was the nature of this control? How was it achieved? What was its scope and limitations?

(e) In the process of rapid and modern change that began with the advent of British rule, new political groupings have emerged, such as the Nri Progress Union and the Community Council, which is a local government system. What is the nature of these new groupings? Why and how is the Nri Progress Union more integrated into the modified traditional political structure than the Community Council?

#### *The general problems*

The general problems are as follows:

(a) The earliest reports show that Nri people played a major role in the dissemination and the practice of certain political and ritual ideologies in Igbo land. What was the extent of this influence? What was its character and nature? Who and what is Nri? What is the nature and character of the political development of Nri in the context of the Igbo culture area?

(b) Considering social change as a long-term process in Nri, the archaeological and certain documentary evidence, the oral tradition and the behaviour patterns associated with some material culture, indicate that certain symbolic motifs and the behaviour patterns associated with them have remained comparatively stable. What are those cultural aspects that changed or did not change? To what extent does this type of information give a clue for establishing some type of probable cultural continuity between the culture represented in the Igbo-ukwu finds and the Nri culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on the one hand, and that of the twentieth century on the other hand?

In Chapter 1 I have dealt briefly with the roles of the Nri people in the development of a pan-Igbo culture, with the meaning of the word 'Nri', which has six cultural connotations.

Chapter 2 gives a brief account of the political culture history of Nri. This will help unfold the dynamic significance of the religious and political ideology of Nri kinship and kingship in terms of

time and space on the one hand, and also bring into perspective the foundation, growth, decline and collapse of the Nri state systems and hegemony on the other hand.

Chapter 3 briefly examines the religious and cosmological beliefs which Nri people share in common with other Igbo peoples, and how Nri people manipulated the communicative aspects of these belief systems for both political and economic ends.

Nri economy was partly based on agriculture, partly on a system of markets and partly on religious and political services. Chapter 4 examines the system of production, distribution and consumption, both at the domestic and at the state level. It shows how these are correlated to the political and ritual statuses related to leadership, how they are related to the development of the state and hegemony and how they generate political action.

Chapter 5 analyses the structure of leadership and shows how the ritual and political roles of individuals and groups are defined and determined by achieved statuses based on wealth, title-taking and knowledgeability in Nri religion and traditions.

As the basic structure of Nri's political system is the segmentary lineage system, Chapter 6 deals with political groupings whose formation, continuity and function are based on lineage principles. It also argues that the Nri case strongly indicates that the theory of segmentary lineages and segmentary opposition, as put forward by Evans-Pritchard, M. Fortes and P. Bohannan, has to be handled and applied with great caution.

Chapter 7 deals with political groupings whose formation, continuity and function are based mainly on other principles of group organization.

In Chapter 8 the internal political organization is examined in the light of facts discussed in earlier chapters. The various political actions generated by the various political groupings at both the lineage and state level are discussed and the process of government at both levels spelled out.

In Chapter 9 I have analysed the external affairs of Nri, the character and the ritual basis of the Nri hegemony, the external control system and the economic basis of the hegemony. Particular attention is given to the role of Orieri kingdom and its relationship with Nri kingdom and hegemony. It is argued that the Nri political organizations

and ideology probably developed many centuries before the advent of Europeans in the coast of Biafra. The extent, decline and collapse of the hegemony has also been reconstructed.

Chapter 10 discusses the nature of changes that took place from 1900 to 1972 and how two new political groupings, the Nri Progress Union and the Community Council, which was then the East Central State Government official body at the local level, emerge and co-exist with the modified forms of the traditional system.

In the conclusion, Chapter 11, I have attempted to summarize the main characteristics of Nri political organization and its uniqueness in the Igbo culture area. Finally, I have analysed the traditional Nri concepts of political power and authority and how these concepts not only influence the distribution of power and authority at both the state and lineage levels, but also determine the structure of leadership.

## INTRODUCTION: NOTES

1. T. SHAW, *Igbo-Ukwu: Account of Archaeological Societies in Eastern Nigeria*, 1970, Vols. I and II.

Orieri was a Nri settlement founded at an early period of Nri history. Oral traditions collected from Nri tend to confirm the oral traditions, collected from Umu Nri Agu in Orieri, that Orieri migrated from Nri town. Mr I.C.K. Anadi confirms this in his booklet, *Our Cultural Heritage of Orieri and Orieri Genealogical Chart* (1967). Mr Anadi is from Orieri. (See Chapter 9 on Nri-Orieri relationship).

There are lineages at Oraukwu, Ogboli-Ibusa and Ogwashi-ukwu that refer to themselves as Umu-Nri-Agu and also claim to have come from Agukwu-Nri. This is consistent with the Igbo naming system. The Umu-Nri-Agu of Orieri would have probably migrated from Agukwu-Nri during the Nri migration to Orieri. (See Map 2, Chapter 1). The migration would have been from Nri to Orieri, but there is yet no evidence to support this view.

The archaeological objects were excavated in the boundary between Orieri and Igbo-ukwu in the Igbo-ukwu side. There is evidence to show that the site was formerly Orieri territory. In any case, surface and chance finds reported from Orieri and Nri suggest that similarly rich recoveries could probably be excavated from both towns.

After an extensive study of the culture of the area, I am strongly convinced that the Igbo-ukwu objects can be culturally defined as Nri culture, for the following reasons:

- Orieri and Igbo-ukwu are culturally similar except that Orieri used to have an Eze Nri while Igbo-ukwu did not. In the past Orieri men conferred the *Ozo* title on Igbo-ukwu.
- During an identification survey in which I showed the photographs of the objects to Nri, Orieri and Igbo-ukwu elders,

Nri and Oreri elders scored higher marks in the identification and in the definition of use than the Igbo-ukwu elders. (See Chapter 9 for further clarification of the identification method used).

(c) The wide distribution in Igbo land of some of the Igbo-ukwu traits such as the *ichi* marks and ozo title is coterminous with the extent of Nri influence in Igbo land. Over 90% of Igbo towns visited point to Nri as the centre of most of their ritual and political ideologies and about 10% point to Oreri. Not one town points to Igbo-ukwu. (See Appendix 3 for towns visited).

2. T. SHAW, *op. cit.*

3. D. HARTLE, *Archaeology in Eastern Nigeria in West African Archaeological Newsletter No. 5*; and *Antiquities in Igbo Land in African Notes, Special Number 1972*.

4. T. SHAW, *op. cit.*

5. Some important older Igbo towns, connected with the Nri political system, directly or indirectly, at one time or another, were:

East of the Niger: Aguleri, Nnando, Nteje, Umuleri, Igboarim, Amanuke, Awka, Enugu-ukwu, Enugu-Agidi, Nneofia, Amawobia, Nimo, Nise, Adazi, Obeledu, Akwaeze, Agulu, Isu-Ofia, Orawkwu, Igbo-ukwu, Oreri, Ikenga, Ogidi, Obosi, Amansi, Ekwuluobia, Neni, Abatete, Umuoji, Ukpo, Eha-Alumona, Umani, Opi, Nsukka-Asadu, Inyi, Umunze, Uga, Orlu, Uli, Ihiala, Udi, Ugu-Oba, Ebenebe, Nnewi, Oba, Nkwere, Isu, certain Okigwe and Owerri and Mbaise villages. Nri people were constantly visiting some Owerri and Okigwe villages to perform Ozo title and *Ifejioku* rituals.

West of the Niger: Ibusa, Abala, Asaba, Illah, Ogwashi-ukwu, Iselle-ukwu, Owa, Ute, some Kwalle lineages, Uchi, Akuku, (all the Ogboli groups). (See Appendix 3).

6. J.D. JORDAN, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*, 1949, pp. 37, 42 and 67-68.



# **Part One**

## **The Context**

## Chapter 1

### The Setting: The Igbo Culture Area

Nri culture is one of the many sub-cultures that developed in the Igbo culture area. Owing to the profound influence that Nri people exerted on the development of some Igbo cultures, it is almost impossible to isolate what derives from Nri culture from what derives from other Igbo cultures. But it is generally accepted by traditional Igbo people that the distinctive features of Nri culture are the Nri title complex which is epitomized in a hierarchy of titles such as the *ichi*, *ozo* or Nri titles, and the Nri religious concepts of *Chukwu*, *Alusi*, *Mmuo*, *Ifejioke* and the ideology of abomination. Because the Nri title complex and/or their religious ideology are found all over Igbo land in one form or another, probably as a result of centuries of dissemination by the Nri people, it is helpful to examine briefly the cultural stage on which the Nri people performed this cultural drama.

The Igbo live in South-Eastern Nigeria. They numbered about 8.5 million people in 1963, of which about 7.5 million were living in the former East Central State and the others in the north of the Rivers State and the east of the former Mid-West State. They have one of the highest population densities in West Africa, ranging from 300 to over 1,000 persons per square mile. They exploit the palm produce in the West African equatorial forest and cultivate yams, cocoyams, maize and cassava.<sup>1</sup> Domestic technology of bronze casting, ironwork and pottery and wood work probably dates back to the ninth century A.D., as indicated in the Igbo-ukwu archaeological finds. Excellent craftsmanship still exists in wood and ivory carving, ironwork and pottery, but the skill of bronze casting has degenerated considerably.<sup>2</sup>

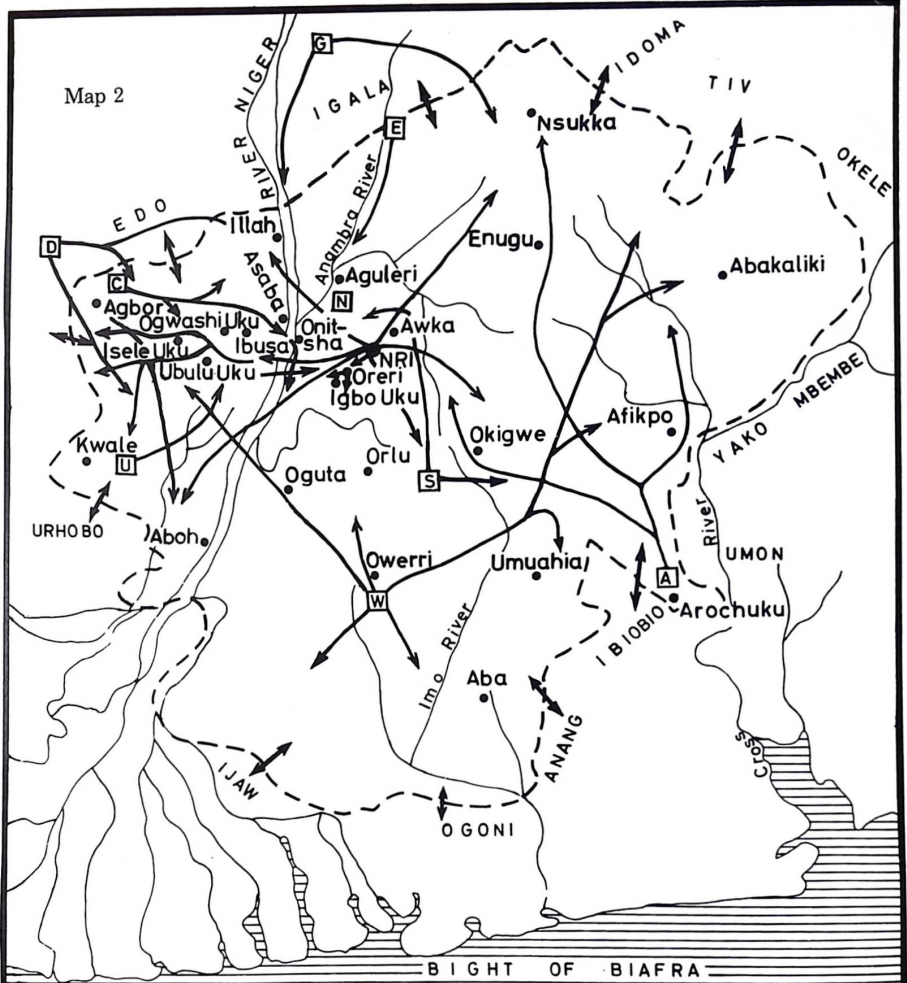
The Igbo culture area may be defined as an area enclosed by an imaginary line running outside of the settlements of Agbor, Kwalle (West Niger Igbo), Ahoada, Diobu, Umuabayi (Port Harcourt),

Aro-chukwu, Afikpo, Isiagu (Abakiliki area), Enugu Ezike (Nsukka area), and Ebu (West Niger Igbo).<sup>3</sup> In this area the Igbo live in patrilineages called *Umunna*. Patrilineages are ranked from minimal to maximal. Patrilineages of variable depth and span and of diverse origins federated to become villages. Groups of villages federated to form towns called *Obodo*. Towns are generally dispersed, especially among the Igbo east of the Niger, but are more compact amongst the Igbo west of the Niger. Mixed, dispersed and compact settlements are also found in Nri.<sup>4</sup>

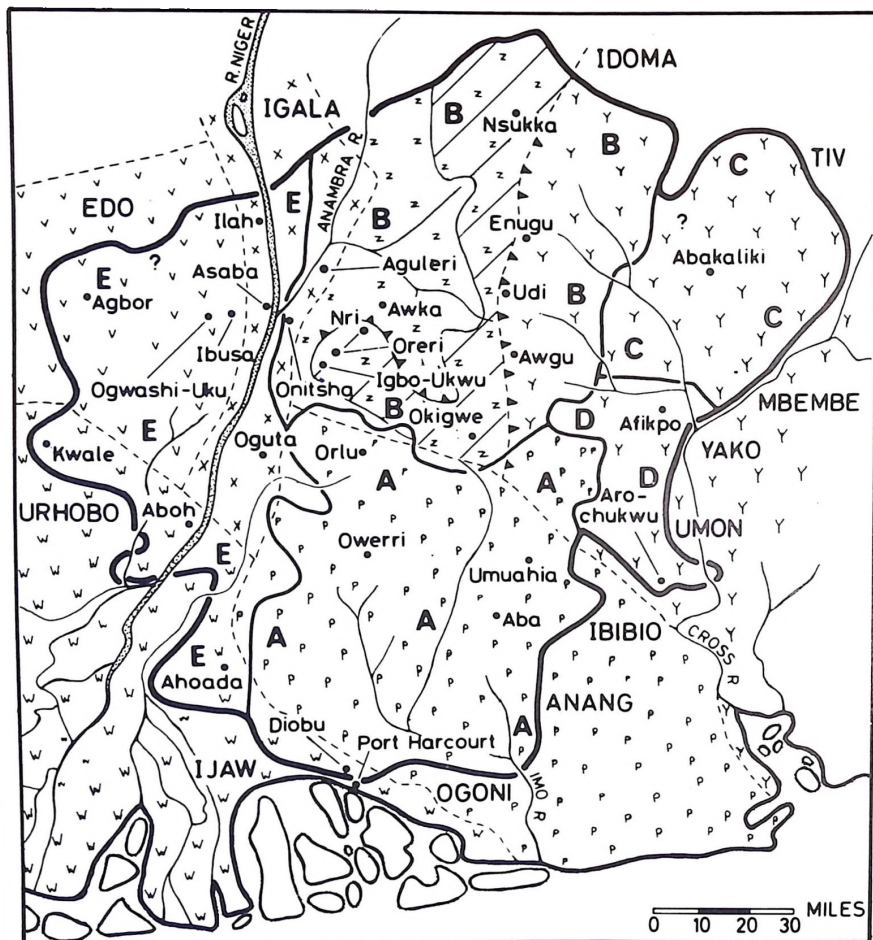
My view, based on genealogical material cross-checked against oral traditions, and on other evidence based on archaeological and some linguistic data, is that it seems probable that nine major movements of peoples might be postulated to account for the present distribution and diversities of people and cultures in the Igbo culture area. These movements are probably as follows: the Owerri movement, the Eri movement probably around A.D. 900, the Nri movement probably between A.D. 900 and 1911, the Isu movement during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the Ubulu movement during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Ezechima movement during the seventeenth century, the Idu (Benin) movement during the eighteenth century, and the Igala movement during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These movements are diagrammatically shown in Map 2. It will not be possible to discuss the nature and character of each movement here.<sup>5</sup>

Permanent Igbo settlements are widely distributed in six ecological areas within the Igbo culture area. These comprise (see Map 3):

- I the southern half of the scarplands of south-eastern Nigeria.



- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 [W] Owerri movement before AD 800        | 2 [E] Eri - movement around AD 800       |
| 3 [N] Nri - movement AD 900 - 1911         | 4 [S] Isu - movement 15th-16th Centuries |
| 5 [U] Ubulu movement 16th-17th Centuries   | 6 [C] Chima - movement 17th Century      |
| 7 [A] Aro - movement 17th-19th Centuries   | 8 [D] Idu - movement 18th Century        |
| 9 [G] Igala - movement 18th-19th Centuries |  |
- — — Boundary of Igbo culture area
- ↔ Border movement



--- Ecological boundary

— Boundary of Igbo sub-culture

— Boundary of Igbo culture area

▼▼▼ Escarpment

/// Plateau



Palm belt



Cross River basin



The Scarplands



Lower Niger valley



Midwest lowlands



Niger Delta

? Enclaves

**A** Southern Igbo

**B** Northern Igbo

**C** N. Eastern Igbo

**D** Eastern Igbo

**E** Western Igbo

Map 3 Ecology of the Igbo culture area



- II the southern half of the lower Niger basin.
- III the Mid-West lowlands.
- IV the Niger delta.
- V the Palm Belt of south-eastern Nigeria.
- VI the Cross River basin.

#### I *The southern half of the scarplands.*

The town of Nri, with a population in 1963 of about ten thousand in an area of six square miles, is situated 400–600 ft above sea level, in the depression of Agulu Lake, on latitude 6.08°N and longitude of 6.02°E, about eighteen miles east of Onitsha on the river Niger. Nri town is located in an area ecologically described as the scarplands of south-eastern Nigeria.

This area has varied landscapes: the scarp slopes at Enugu and Awgu, the eroded gullies at Agulu and Nri, the flat top ridges at Aku, the escarpment running west of Nsukka to Awgu and the Udi-Nsukka plateau.<sup>6</sup> Centuries of human habitation have modified the characteristic tropical regime of the southern part into open mixed palm forest. Population densities of 450–1,000 persons per square mile have been recorded.

Around Awka, Nri, Nanka, Nnewi, Igbo-ukwu and Oreri farming is not very productive because the soil has been subjected to centuries of surface erosion and leaching. This disaster, which probably began centuries ago, may have set off the series of famines well remembered in the oral traditions of the people.

This area is inhabited by peoples whom D. Forde and G.I. Jones call the Northern Igbo, whose distinctive cultural features are: a highly developed title system based on the *ozo* title, a well developed *Mmuo* society, deep genealogies of eight to ten generations, elaborate temples for supernatural beings called *Alusi* and ancestor temples called *obu*. At Nri and Oreri, sacred kingship was developed par excellence. It is this ecological area that nurtured the cultures that 'produced' and used the Igbo-ukwu and the Ezira bronze objects.

It may be postulated that the development of a highly ritualized and symbolic culture which gave rise to Nri hegemony might perhaps have been one of the responses to the disaster of soil erosion and the resultant low productivity of the soil. The elementary domestic technology had to cope with agricultural production in an ecology faced with the problem of an ever increasing population and

ever decreasing soil fertility. It seemed impossible to control the productivity of the land with limited technology in this type of ecology; it was easier to control men's activities on land. It was easier to make men believe that through a ritual process the unproductive land could become productive. The concomitant effect was that Nri people became ritual experts and traders, Awka and Agbaja became smiths and the Umudioka became craftsmen. Thus the pressure on the land was reduced.

Nri hegemony and the state system were based on the ritualization of the political system and domestic economy. Trading activities were ritualized by associating markets with the supernatural beings called *Eke*, *Oye*, *Afo* and *Nkwo*. Yam, palm produce, cocoyam and vegetables were ritualized in the *Ifejioku* cult. Leadership was ritualized in the various title systems epitomized in the *ozo* title, which was controlled and directed by the king of Nri, called Eze Nri. Similarly, crude agricultural tools such as the hoe, cutlasses, digging sticks, clubs and the single- and double-headed iron spears, and swords of various types were all ritualized. It was considered an abomination to spill human blood in violence on the surface of the earth. Thus the earth was ritualized as a supernatural force called *Ana* and *Ajana*.

The concept of peace, harmony and truth was ritually symbolized and enacted in the ceremonies of the *ozo*-titled men, who were also the political elite. Nri men who had taken the *ichi* title always carried in their hands the spear of peace called *otonsi*. With the spear of peace in their hands and the *ichi* marks on their faces, they were identified as the 'sons' of Eze Nri, *Nwa nri*, who controlled the mystical force. They travelled generally unmolested from one Igbo settlement to another as agents of Eze Nri to perform political and ritual functions associated with the removing of abomination, the dissolving of the codes of abomination and the enacting of new codes, the ordaining of ritual and political officials, the crowning of chiefs, the making of peace and the creating of markets and shrines. In the performance of these activities Nri people spread into different parts of Igbo land and Eze Nri held some degree of control over the external and internal politics of the older Igbo settlements.

These settlements began to regard themselves

as people under the spiritual umbrella of Eze Nri, and Eze Nri regarded them as settlements that ought to be mystically protected from the catastrophes emanating from the mystical forces that were believed to plague human existence. Thus a hegemony based on religious ascendancy was established.

II The southern half of the Lower Niger basin  
The Lower Niger basin was remarkable for attracting settlements because of the existence of the Niger-Anambra flood plains which afforded good soil for the growth of yam and green vegetables. The rivers afforded an easy and safe means of communication. The population density is 450 – 1,000 persons per square mile on the eastern bank of the Niger and 100 – 200 on the western bank, except in the flood plains.

The northern part is inhabited by the Aniocha group of Western Igbo and the southern part by the riverain group of western Igbo. These western Igbo peoples are characterized by the heterogeneity of their culture, their compact settlement pattern and a more centralized political system, with a head called *diokpa* or a king called *obi* or *eze*.

Settlements of various origins have grown up on both banks of the Niger and Anambra between Illah, below Aboh and around Aguleri. Seven types of settlement may be distinguished according to claims recorded in the oral traditions of the settlements. Some Anam, Asaba and Ndoni claim east Igbo origin; Oko claims Idah origin; Okwe, Ossissa, Onitsha and Aboh claim Benin origin but are closely connected with Agbor; Uchi, Oguta and Egbema claim mixed origin from Benin and neighbouring settlements; Nzam and Abarra claim mixed Igbo and Igala origin; Ossomari claims mixed Benin and Ida origin and Atani claims mixed Igbo, Benin and Igala origins.<sup>7</sup>

The character of these settlements cannot be fully understood until a further anthropological investigation is made on a number of them, but the wide distribution of *ozo* titles and Nri religious system amongst them is indicative of Nri influence. This influence in terms of ritual and political control was obvious in the older settlements such as Asaba, Illah, and also considerable in the newer settlements like Onitsha and Oguta, but minimal in more distant settlements like Agbor and Aboh.<sup>8</sup> Since Nri influence penetrated deeper westwards

into the mid-west lowlands, it can be validly proposed that the complex water system of the lower Niger and the recent and culturally heterogeneous origin of these riverain towns might have been some of the factors that inhibited the effective control of this area by Nri.

### III The mid-west lowland

The western Igbo inhabit the eastern part of the Mid-West lowland, which is generally level and the sandy soil is arable and easily rejuvenated by long fallowing. The population density is 100 – 200 persons per square mile. Settlements are more compact and they tend towards the urban type.

A re-assessment of the oral traditions collected shows that four categories of settlements can be distinguished. These are:

- (a) settlements whose core and original founders were from the East Igbo, with or without other ethnic elements such as Ogwashi-ukwu, Ibusa and probably Agbor.
- (b) settlements whose core founders were from neighbouring settlements such as Okpanam and Uburu.
- (c) settlements whose core founders were Yoruba, such as Odiani, but who are now mainly Igbo in culture.
- (d) settlements whose core founders were from Ishan and Benin, such as Idumu Asa, Igboodo and Otolokpo, but are now mainly Igbo in culture. (Includes some Agbor clans.)

There are strong indications that Nri influence in this area was great. Nri lineages occur at Illah, Ibusa, Akuku, Issele-ukwu, Ogwashi-uku, Owa, Ute Okpu and near Kwalle; these lineages are either king-makers or *ozo* title makers, or provide the king of towns like Ogwashi uku.<sup>9</sup>

In most of these towns *ozo* titles are important aspects of the leadership institutions.<sup>10</sup> The Nri religious beliefs associated with the Creator, *Chukwu Okiye*, the various supernatural beings, *Alusi*, and the ancestors, *Ndi ichie*, feature prominently in the area.

It is also evident in Agbor that the structure of their political system is based on the *Eze*-title, *Ndi ichie*, and segmentary patrilineages called *Umunna*, and that their rituals are based on *Agbala Nze*, *Ikenga* cult, *Ofo*, *Ndi ichie* and *alusi*. According to their history, all these had been

established before they experienced direct contact with Benin in the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> These features are typical Nri culture elements. The presence of a Nri lineage at Owa and Ute Okpu, near Agbor, finally indicates the limit of Nri influence westwards.<sup>12</sup>

#### IV The Niger delta

The Niger delta is low country, almost completely swamped at certain times of the year by water. Ecologically it is very difficult terrain. The southern part is characterized by salt-water swamps, and the north by fresh-water swamps. It is an extension of the Lower Niger plains. The population density varies. In the western delta it is 100 – 200 persons per square mile, in the mid-delta it is under 100, and it rises to 300 – 450 persons per square mile in the eastern delta.

The peopling of this area might have occurred in three phases: the pre-Benin phase, the Benin phase and the European phase. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Europeans began to frequent the coast for trade in slaves and palm oil, a southward movement of people from Igbo land occurred.<sup>13</sup> Before these movements took place it seems likely that Nri influence had reached Kwale, Umuakasiada in the western delta and the Ahoada area, but there is as yet no evidence of Nri control of this area in the distant or recent past. Indeed, Nri oral traditions only refer to early trade relationship with this area.<sup>14</sup>

#### V The palm belt of south-eastern Nigeria

The Igbo occupy the northern half of this area which stretches into Ibibio and Ijaw territories to the south. The growth of vegetation is rapid in this belt, and palm forest has taken the place of the original rain forest, indicating that the area had long been populated by people whose main livelihood was farming.<sup>15</sup> This area is the most densely populated part of Western Africa. A population of more than 1,000 persons per square mile has been recorded in Northern Ngwa, Owerri and Orlu. The Etche-Ikwerre and Western Aba areas are less densely populated, with 300 – 400 persons per square mile.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries population movement to the south was accelerated by the slave and palm oil trade with the European and coastal peoples.<sup>16</sup> This is the habitat occupied by peoples whom Forde and Jones called the

Southern Igbo.<sup>17</sup> The distinctive cultural features that distinguish the Southern Igbo from others are the marked absence of elaborate title systems and *mmuo* societies, although secret societies occur among Ohohu Ngwa and masked dances occur in the western border of this sub-culture area. The ritual slave system called *osu* is strongly developed here and the *Mbari* temples associated with the cult of the earth called *Ala* occur in the southern part.

There is evidence of Nri influence in this area, more especially on the northern part. The *duru* title and Nri type rituals connected with the earth, ancestor and yam cults occur. The *duru* title is a southern Igbo version of the *ozo* title, and it is said to have been conferred in the past by Nri men who were referred to as 'Umudioka' in some parts of this area. Christian religion, especially Catholicism, has in recent times greatly eroded traditional institutions, especially the rituals, so it is difficult to define in detail the character of Nri influence in this area.

#### VI The Cross-river Basin

This is the area occupied by the eastern Igbo, the north-eastern Igbo and some northern Igbo who dwell east of the scarplands of south-eastern Nigeria. The population density varies. At Abakaliki it is 300 – 450 persons per square mile and around Bende and Afikpo as high as 450 – 1,000 per square mile.

In this region the Igbo culture area comes in direct contact with other cultures – the Idoma, Tiv, Ukelle, Mbembe, Yako, Ekoi, Umon and Ibibio. All these cultures have helped in one way or another to modify the basic Igbo cultures.

The Abam, Ada, Ohaffia and Afikpo share certain cultural features, such as the double unilineal system of inheritance and secret societies, characteristic of their Yako neighbours. The Afam, Ada and Ohaffia have an age-set system which was used for raiding.<sup>18</sup> At Nike the *ohu* system of slavery, based on the establishment of separate slave settlements by the owners, was developed.<sup>19</sup>

The settlement centred around Arochukwu was said to have been founded by both Igbo slave dealers and slaves from the hinterland of Igbo country around Awka and from Ibibio land. Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Aro people monopolized one of the major



slave trade routes between the hinterland and the coast of Biafra by manipulating the oracle of Arochukwu and the para-military age-set system of the Abam, Ada and Ohafia. The latter were employed as mercenaries and deployed to raid Igbo villages situated within the Nri sphere of influence and control. There is evidence that suggests that Nri influence extended beyond the Aro settlements of Ndikelionwu and Ndiokpaleze before the Aro incursion. The Ezira archaeological finds dated at the fifteenth century A.D. are to the east of these settlements.

### Conclusion

The diversities and variations that occur in the Igbo culture area may derive to some extent from the differing ecologies of many Igbo peoples. Other factors may also be significant in accounting for marked local variation, such as local and sub-regional trading practices, population pressure on available resources, extent of exposure to European commerce and, above all, perhaps, individual response to such material factors. But, generally, the Igbo peoples share a common basic culture centred around a common language, common institutions, common religious and cosmological beliefs.

This type of unity within a variable cultural complex had full expression in the area, in the kola-nut and white chalk customs, the vigour in Igbo music and dance movements, their highly developed arts of wall decoration and delicate body paintings, their pottery designs, weaving, folklore, oral literature, *mmuo* dances and drama and traditional games, and pastimes such as wrestling, acrobatics, archery and fencing.<sup>20</sup>

One major factor instrumental in the levelling of cultures in the Igbo culture area was the activity of Nri people. Nri lineages are still found in most parts of the older Igbo settlements, and their past cultural and political influence is known in most parts of Igbo settlements north of Kwale-Owerri-Okigwe.

### Who and what is Nri?

The term 'Nri' has generally been confused in the existing literature and it is essential to understand the multiple meanings of the concept, 'Nri'.<sup>21</sup> To answer this question I will refer to the earliest records made about Nri and to archaeological evidence and my own ethnographic work.

The earliest indirect reference to Nri culture

was given by Olaudah Equiano in 1789. Equiano was a liberated Igbo slave who wrote his own life history in a volume called *The interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano*. In this book Equiano described the facial marks on the faces of the rulers of his town thus: 'Those *Embrenche*, or chief men, decided disputes and punished crimes, for which purpose they always assembled together.'<sup>22</sup> His description of the facial marks shows that *Embrenche* refers to the Igbo word *mgburichi* which means 'those marked *ichi* on their faces.' *Ichi* marks are still found among Nri men born before 1920 and on the faces of some elders of areas once under Nri influence.

Captain John Adam, who was the captain of a slave ship that frequented the Bight of Benin and Biafra, writing in 1823, had this to say concerning a class of Igbo slaves: 'A class of Heebos called Breeche, and whom many very erroneously considered to be a distinct nation, masters of slave ships have always had a strong aversion to purchase, because the impression made on their minds by their degraded situation was rendered more galling and permanent from the exalted rank which they occupied in their own country, and which was thought to have a very favourable influence on their shipmates and countrymen in misfortune.' This record also says '“Breeche” in the Heebo language signifies gentlemen or the oldest son of one, and who is not allowed to perform in his own country any manual office. He inherits, at his father's death, all his slaves and had the absolute control over the wives and children which he has left behind him. Before attaining the age of manhood his forehead is scarified and the skin brought down from the hair to the eyebrows so as to form a line of indurated skin from one temple to the other. This peculiar mark is distinctive of his rank.'<sup>23</sup>

It is definitely clear that Captain Adam's 'Heebos' refers to Igbo and 'Breeche' refers to *gburuchi*, which is another word for Nri men or men with *ichi* marks on their faces. Captain Adam's description of when the marks were made and the status they conferred on the person is remarkably similar to what I found in Nri town, except in a few details that are not relevant here.<sup>24</sup>

W.B. Baikie in his book *Narrative of an exploring voyage up the River Kwora and Bine, 1845* says 'I inquired particularly after a supposed district or tribe mentioned by Clerk and some other writers

as I'tshi or Bretsh, but there is no place of this name. But I'tshi which means 'cut-face', refers to certain individuals who are marked by numerous cuttings on the forehead.<sup>125</sup> From our present knowledge it is clear that Baikie's *Itshi* should refer to *nshi* or *ichi* and his '*Bretsh*' refers to *gburuchi*. It is also known that Nri, Nshi and Nhi are variations in Igbo dialects meaning the same people who now live in Nri and Orieri south-east of Onitsha.

Major A.G. Leonard, a student of comparative religion, worked for ten years among the peoples of the Lower Niger. He published in 1906 a very informative work on Nri in his book *The Lower Niger and its Tribes*. Leonard named the towns that still paid tribute to Eze Nri, and on the function of Nri people in Igbo land he wrote: 'Nri or Nshi – evidently the same place, but a different pronunciation of it – is a town which is situated about forty or fifty miles to the east, i.e. behind Onitsha...the inhabitants of this particular town are known as "king-makers", in other words they possess the sole prerogative of conferring the title of royalty in all the Ibo country...the insignia being an anklet made of pineapple... They also, it appears, enjoy the privilege of walking untouched and unharmed through any portion of the same... So the Nri family, for the same sacred reason, are not only the progenitor but the priests of the whole Ibo race and, as such, high priests, taking precedence of all other fraternities, priestly, social and political.'<sup>126</sup>

Northcote W. Thomas, the government anthropologist who published his work in 1913, confirmed most of Leonard's account on Nri. In his book *Anthropological Report on the Igbo-speaking Peoples of Nigeria, Part 1*, he wrote 'The Eze Nri claimed that he had to settle disputes in the territory that acknowledged him... I could see no disputes were referred to him at all. But an important function that he fulfilled was to vary or abolish the *nso ani* by means of sacrifices... Another function performed by the king is that of promoting the growth of yams and securing an abundance of palm wine.'<sup>127</sup>

Before 1910 missionaries had started to visit the interior of Igbo land. They recorded what they heard and saw. According to the Rev. Father Duhaze's record of 1907–1910 which was quoted by Jordan in the book *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*:<sup>6</sup> 'The very first town visited in

the deep interior was that of *Nri*, the headquarters of juju and voodoo and pagan priesthood for the whole Ibo tribe. This was a genuine attack on Satan in his citadel, for Nri represented the heart of paganism.'<sup>128</sup> On the influence of Nri, Duhaze wrote 'The religious influence of Nri...once extended over the whole Ibo country. The Nri's were the high priests of the idols and from their hands the chiefs loved to receive the insignia of office. They regulated even the building of huts for fetishes...the arrival of the king was preceded by the ringing of bells and by a storm of clapping.'<sup>129</sup>

Let us turn to archaeological evidence. The excavations of both Thurstan Shaw and D. Hartle opened a new horizon in the study of Nri cultures. A closer study of the Igbo-ukwu objects reveals that over 90% of the symbolic motifs depicted on or represented by the objects are similar in many striking respects to the present symbolic motifs and/or objects associated with certain political and religious behaviour. Here it is sufficient to stress that, for example, the *ichi* mark described by Equiano, Adam and Baikie is still found on the faces of Nri peoples and peoples associated with their culture. Similar marks were depicted on the faces of four human forms engraved on a bronze object excavated at Igbo-ukwu. Thus, at least, a continuity of form may be established.

At this stage I will attempt to summarize what the word Nri stands for. My analysis here is based on what Nri people say and do, and what other Igbo peoples say about Nri, in addition to data collected by early observers and archaeologists.

The word Nri can have six cultural references, depending on the context of usage.

- i Nri can be the name of a person. Nri was the name of the founder of Nri clans, the son of Eri, the founder of Eri clans in the Anambra valley. Nri is reincarnated in his grandchildren, and so on, to this day. So Nri could be taken as a name or used as a suffix or prefix of names, e.g. Nri, Nrijofo and Nwanri.
- ii Nri was the name given to the highest ritual political title in Igbo land. The highest title taken in Igbo land in the past was the *Nze* or *Ozo* or *Eze* or *Obi* title.<sup>30</sup> But at Nri and Orieri the highest ritual political title was the title of 'Nri'. According to Nri history, the son of Eri took the title of Nri and settled in Nri town;



- later a part broke away and founded Orieri town and continued the Nri tradition there.
- iii Nri is the name of a settlement which has now grown into a town. Nri is the name of a territory occupied by Eze Nri and his people. According to Nri migration history, they left Aguleri on the River Anambra and Amanuke and founded the settlement of Nri, which comprised three villages – Agukwu, Diodo and Akamkpisi. Today they have a population of about 10,000 in an area of about six square miles.
- iv Nri is the name of those people subject to Eze Nri. In the past, Nri men were found in most of the older Igbo settlements, rendering ritual political services. They were known by a type of *ichi* mark on their faces. They carried a spear of peace and diplomatic immunity called *otonsi* in their left hand, and a staff of ritual and political authority called *ofo* in their right hand. They were considered sacred people and might not be molested or killed. They were symbols of inter-village peace and cordial relationships. They were believed to possess the ritual power of cleansing abomination of the earth, *ikpu alu*; making and dissolving Igbo taboos, *ido na isube nso ana*; explaining and erecting new codes of ritual and political behaviour, *Ikowa Odinani*; arbitrating and making peace between villages, *Igbo ogu*; ordaining and consecrating ritual political title holders and chiefs, *ichi echichi*, and removing pollution from the community, *idozi ani*. The power of Nri men derived from the fact that they were said to be linked genealogically in the partriline with the reigning Eze Nri and the past Eze Nri, and Eri.
- v Nri is the name of peoples who claim to have some kind of relationship with Nri people of Agukwu, Diodo and Akamkpisi. In the past, during the Nri movement, Nri men moved to, and settled in, villages under Eze Nri. They became the 'Eyes and Ears' of Eze Nri. Thus today Nri lineages are to be found on both sides of the Niger, at Nsukka and in the Udi area, the Awka area, Orlu area, Abatete, Agulu, Adazi, Nnewi, Ihiala, Owa, Ute, Kwale, Iilah, Ibusa, Ogwashi-uku, Abala, Issele-uku, etc. (See Map 3). Also, settlements founded by the descendants of the first Nri refer to themselves as Umu Nri, that is, the children of Nri. These towns are located south of the Anambra and they include Enugu-ukwu, Enugu-Agadi, Nneofia and Orieri.
- vi Nri is the name of a culture. Nri people call their culture *odinani Nri*. Other Igbo refer to certain Igbo culture complexes as belonging to Nri. There is evidence to postulate that this culture was born and nurtured in the valley of the upper Anambra and diffused southwards by migration.<sup>31</sup>

## CHAPTER ONE: NOTES

1. D.G. COURSEY, *Yams*C.W.S. HARTLEY, *The Oil Palm*.2. J.M.O. FIELD, *Bronze Castings at Igbo, Southern Nigeria*.

The pottery types found at Igbo-ukwu are similar to the type still found at surface level in various parts of the area extending from Inyi in Udi Division to Nnewi and from Orlu areas north of Nri. Inyi and Orlu areas are rich in clay and both areas are famous for decorative pottery used for ritual, political and prestige purposes. The scarpland area is still rich in iron ore and the Abakaliki area in lead and copper. Tin and copper could be traded from the north and ivory from the Cameroons. During the trans-Atlantic trade period, copper was obtained from European traders because slave trading made internal trading unsafe. Awka, Nkwere and Agbaja iron workers and smiths still exist. Nri is famous for ivory carving and Umudioka for body marks. (See Table 11, Chapter 4).

3. D. FORDE and G.I. JONES, *The Ibo and Ibibio speaking peoples of South Eastern Nigeria*.M.A. ONWUEJEOGWU, *The typology of settlement patterns in the Igbo culture area*.

This area has been defined by D. Forde and G.I. Jones as the Igbo speaking area. This classification is explicitly based on linguistic criteria. There are other criteria implicitly used which I have tried to clarify. According to my survey of 1966–1967, the Igbo culture area, which is almost coterminous to Forde and Jones' Igbo-speaking area, may be thought of as a unit, enclosed by a hypothetical line, in which the people not only speak the various dialects of the Igbo language, but also have typical and significant common culture traits, complexes and patterns developed around six dominant culture themes: linguistic, social, cultural, political, religious and economic. In the statistical computation used in processing the data collected from the fifty-six towns sampled, only towns which have 50% of these traits and complexes were included in the Igbo culture area. Allowance has also been made for the fluidity of culture at the periphery of the area. There are diversities of culture within the culture area: for example,

Forde and Jones isolated five, while I think it useful to isolate up to six. (See Map 3). This method of using culture complexes in defining culture area may be regarded as unsound by some structuralists and functionalists. But, like some American anthropologists such as Kroeber, I found it a useful technique to draw the culture map of an area with a heterogeneous cultural background with groups expressing common ethnicity by using common cultural symbolism. In short, it is a broad technique of delimiting the cultural, ecological and territorial base of ethnicity. Thus one can talk of 'Edo culture area' and 'Hausa culture area' in drawing the culture map of Nigeria.

4. M.A. ONWUEJEOGWU, *Ibid.*

5. M.A. ONWUEJEOGWU, 'The Patterns of Population Movement in the Igbo Culture Area', in *Odinani Journal*, No. 2, 1977.

6. R.K. UDO, *Geographical Regions of Nigeria*.

7. M.A. ONWUEJEOGWU, *The Dawn of Igbo Civilization in the Igbo Culture Area*.

8. I. NZIMIRO, *Studies in the Political System, Chieftancy and Politics in four Niger States*.

R.N. HENDERSON, *The King in Every Man*.

The population figure of Nri quoted here is an average based on my estimate and the official figure given in the 1963 census. All other population figures quoted here are based on the figures of the 1963 census and estimates given by the FAO in *Agricultural Development in Nigeria, 1965-1980*.

9. D. FORDE and G.I. JONES, *op. cit.*

M.A. ONWUEJEOGWU, *op. cit.*

Ozo title holders are also called *Eze*, *Ndri Nze*, or *Obi* in Ibusa, Okpanan and Asaba. It is called *Ima mmuo* in Akumasi and Iselle-uku.

11. A.E. IDUWE, *A Short History of Agbor*.

12. M.A. ONWUEJEOGWU, *op. cit.*

13. A.G. LEONARD, *The Lower Niger and Its Peoples*.

K.O. DIKE, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885*.

14. E.J. ALAGOA, *Long Distance Trade and States in Niger Delta*.

15. C.W.S. HARTLEY, *op. cit.*

16. K.O. DIKE, *op. cit.*

17. D. FORDE and G.I. JONES, *op. cit.*

18. A. OTTENBERG, *Double Descent in an African Society: The Afikpo Village Group*.

19. W.R.G. HORTON, *The Oru System of Slavery in Northern Ibo Village Group*.

20. V.C. UCHENDU, *The Igbo of South-East Nigeria*.

W.W.C. ECNEZONA, *Ibo Musical Instruments in Ibo Culture and Igbo Music*.

P.V.N. EZEKWE, *Native Art and Industry in Awka*.

M.D.W. JEFFREYS, *Awka Wood Carvers and Letter on the Awka Bronzes*.

R.K. BEARDSLEY, *Traditional Igbo Art*.

21. It is important to note that up till 1937 C.K. Meek was still confusing Nri and Awka. He wrote 'But the blacksmiths of Awka have long been notorious... They formed a close guild and travelled extensively, as smiths...missionaries of priest-chiefs of Nri and of the system of title-taking associated with Nri and, above all, as agents of the oracle of Agbala...' (Meek, 1937, p. 18). Also Forde and Jones frequently used the term Nri-Awka. It is sometimes difficult to know what this term means. (Forde and Jones, 1950, pp. 10, 28-29). But it is clear they were influenced by Meek's work. Nri were priests who controlled the Agbala Nri and Ozo title-taking. The Awka were one of the important specialist craft groups in Igbo land.

22. O. EQUIANO, published 1789.

23. J. ADAM, *Remarks on the Country extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo*.

24. W.B. BAIKIE, published 1856.

The struggle between Eze Nri and the Arochuku slave traders is fully recounted in Chapter 2.

25. W.B. BAIKIE, *Ibid.*

26. A.G. LEONARD, *op. cit.*

Nri is in fact only 20 miles east of Onitsha.

27. N.W. THOMAS, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-speaking Peoples of Nigeria, Part I*.

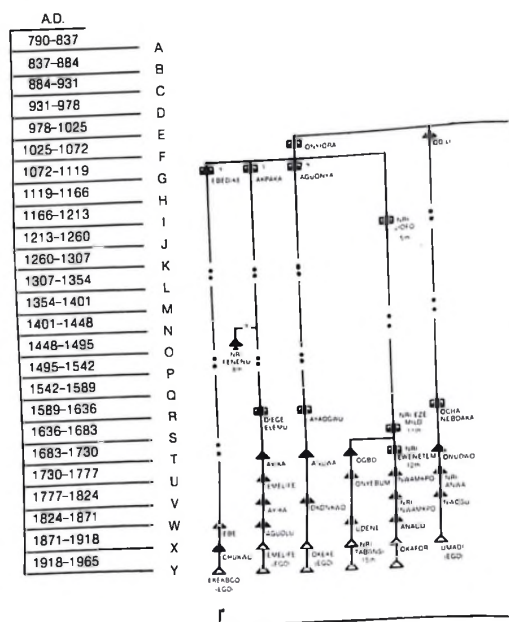
Northcote Thomas' stay in Nri was too short for him to have seen Eze Nri settling disputes between settlements. During my stay, for instance, Eze Nri sent delegations to settle the dispute between Umuleri and Aguleri. A major break-through had been reached in settling the dispute before the outbreak of the Civil War in Nigeria.

28. J.D. JORDAN, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*.

29. J.D. JORDAN, *Ibid.*

30. The Ozo title has many names. In Nri it is called *Ozo*, *Nze*, *Isa mmuo*, *Isa Ile*, *Isa Ekwu*. In West Igbo area it is called *Nze*, *Eze*, *Obi*, and some call it *Ime mmuo*. In Nsukka it is also called *Eze*. In Owerri it is called *Duru* or *Eze mmuo*. Members of the College of Ozo are called *Ndi Nze* or *Ndi Ichie Ukwu*.

31. M.A. ONWUEJEOGWU, *op. cit.*



obtained it was possible to construct a time chart from 1965 back to A.D. 931, probably with some degree of tolerable inaccuracy as the dates regress beyond the sixteenth century A.D. (See Fig. 1). Here, only an outline of the procedure can be attempted.<sup>2</sup>

- i First, it involves the careful collecting of genealogies and the traditions associated with them from 45 different persons who structurally, as a whole, represented a cross-section of Nri society in 1967-1972.
- ii The genealogies were carefully studied as the principal historical and sociological bases of Nri social order. The variations that occurred were isolated, and two general principles were formulated to help cope with these variations.

The first is the principle of *generational stratification*. A hypothetical example will help to illustrate this principle. Figure 2

represents two levels of generation in a given patrilineally organized society. Between 1800 and 1829, children were born every year and were represented as  $A^1$  to  $A^{10}$  and called A-generation. Each of these children bore children at intervals of, say, 30 years marked  $B^1$  to  $B^{10}$  and called B-generation.

In this system all those born between 1800 and 1829 are considered and represented genealogically as belonging to the same generation level. The individuals of A-generational level lived and died as members of the one society. All events that happened during their lifetime are generally associated with that level of generation as if the events occurred within that period. This process, whereby persons and events are represented in one level of generation, and the process in which the upper generation is relatively older than the lower ones is what I have chosen to call *generational stratification*. In

Time & Genealogical Structure

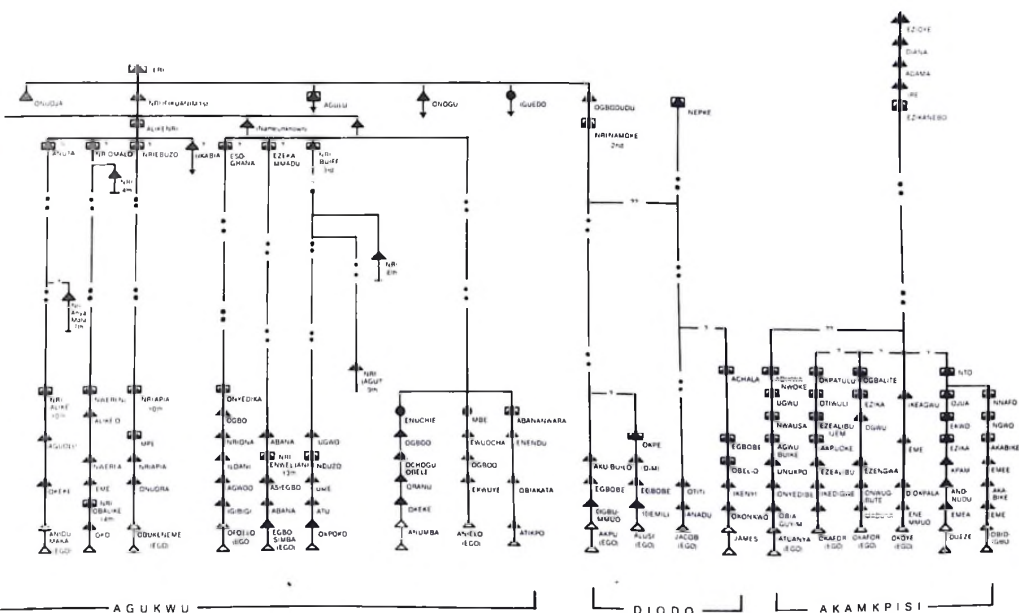
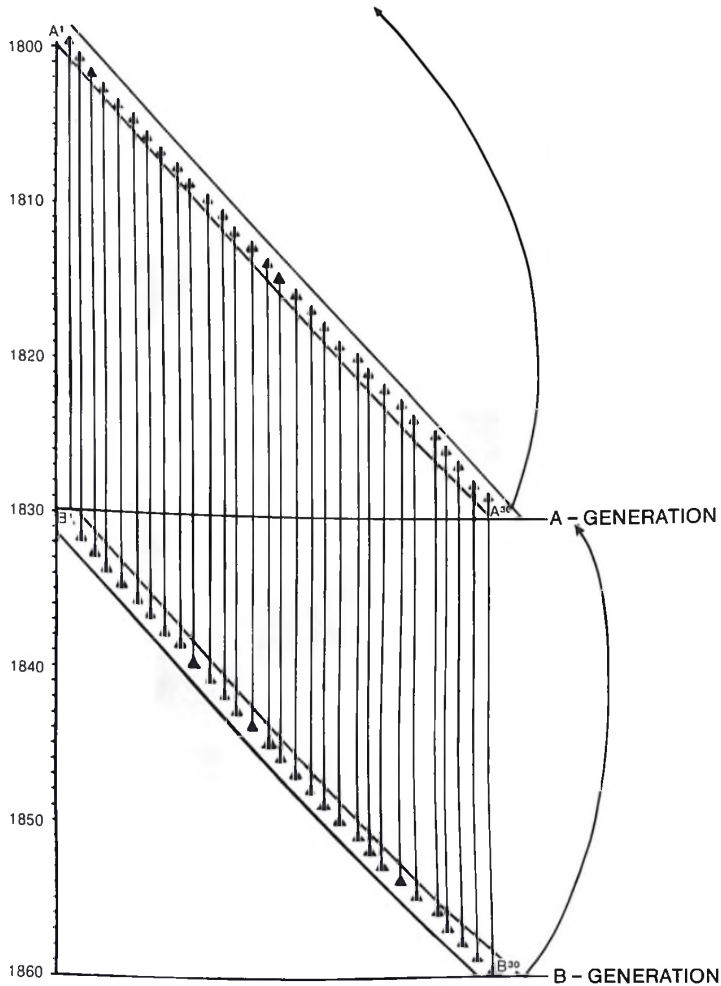


Figure 2 The Principle of Generational Stratification



The arrows indicate that the diagonal representation can be made into a horizontal one by rotating  $A^1 - A^{30}$  on pivot  $A^1$  and rotating  $B^1 - B^{30}$  on pivot  $B^1$ .



giving a chronology to the hypothetical case considered above, one can divide it into two periods of A-generation and B-generation. The period of A-generation may be dated 1800–1830 and that of B-generation 1830–1860.

A *generational interval* has always been defined as the interval between the birth of a father and the birth of his first surviving son.<sup>3</sup> This concept of generational interval cannot cope with the variations that occur in the total genealogy of any given society whose total genealogy is to be converted into a time-scale. I therefore introduced the concept of a *total generational interval*. This can be explained by referring to Figure 2 again. The average time interval that lapses between the birth of A<sup>1</sup> and A<sup>30</sup> or between B<sup>1</sup> and B<sup>30</sup> is given as 30 years. This period of time is also the time interval separating A-generation level from B-generation level. A *total generational interval* may be defined as the time interval between two successive total generational levels, derived by computation.

A *total generational level* is one level of generation as represented in the total genealogy. For instance, in Figure 2, from the apex of level A to the base of level A, that is A<sup>1</sup> to A<sup>30</sup>, constitutes a total generational level. Figure 1 shows all the total generational levels worked out for Nri and marked A to Y.

A *total genealogy* is the genealogical model representing all the culturally significant lineages of the society. For example, the total genealogy of Nri is represented in Figures 9 and 10 in Chapter 6. Figure 1 also represents the total genealogy, but converted into a time-scale.

- iii Nri has an age-grade system in which persons born within a given span of three years belong to one named age-grade. By using this system it was possible to build a chronological chart from 1939–1941 to 1846–1848 and so date events that occurred within this period with a reasonable degree of accuracy. (See Table 42, Chapter 7).
- iv By applying the principles of *generational stratification*, it was possible to systematically synchronize contemporaneous levels of generations in the total genealogy. The next step was to apply the principle of *total*

*generational interval*. The total generational interval was computed by using the age interval between father and succeeding son obtained from V, W, X and Y total generational levels. (See Figure 1). The computed statistical mean is 47 years. From this it was possible to compute the number of total generational levels that probably should have occurred in Nri total genealogy. Since the number of total generational intervals obtainable is greater than the number of total generations in Nri total genealogy, it seems obvious that Nri genealogies were telescoped. It became essential to locate the points telescoped and expand them. Nri has a king list, and adopts a circulating succession. The sequence of the circulation was worked out and possible variations were isolated. The average time it took to complete each cycle was computed as 212 years. This figure is an average for the total period covering the reigns of three kings and three interregna, each interregnum ranging from seven to twenty or more years. From facts obtained in the oral traditions and by applying the sequence of the reigns of the kings, it was possible to locate on the genealogical chart where telescoping probably occurred. At this stage it was also possible to open the telescoped gaps in the genealogies as shown in Figure 1.

- vi Finally, the time-chart shown in Figure 1 was obtained by fitting in the total generational intervals obtained by computation and the king lists (to reflect the order of reigns and the average time interval of the cycle of succession) on the expanded total genealogy.

Using this time-chart, Nri political history may be periodized as follows:<sup>4</sup>

- I The pre-Eri period: probably before A.D. 948.
- II The Eri period at the Anambra: probably c. A.D. 948–1041.
- III The period of migration and the unification: probably c. 1042–1252.
- IV The period of the hey-day of the hegemony: probably c. 1253–1676.
- V The period of the decline and the collapse: probably c. 1677–1936.
- VI The period of revival: 1937 to the present.

## Nri Political History

I The pre-Eri period at the Anambra: probably before c. A.D. 948.

The river Anambra, which is a tributary of the river Niger, flows southwards from the southern Benue watershed through a portion of Igala country and swings westward, emptying into the lower Niger a few miles north of Onitsha.

The meagre evidence at our disposal is contained in the oral tradition that says that when Eri came down the Anambra he set out to unify the surrounding settlements.<sup>5</sup> The Anambra was probably a favourable site for the early development of cultures. Crops, especially yam, do well on its alluvial bank, which is flooded annually. Easy communication on the river and the rich fish yield might have facilitated trade and culture contact. The possibility of surplus products might also have given rise to the early development of status differentiation in the Anambra society. Not much can be said with any degree of certainty until archaeological work is done in the settlement sites that stretch from the middle to the upper valley of the Anambra.

II The Eri period: probably c. A.D. 948–1041. During this period, Eri and his followers established the important Anambra towns of today: Aguleri, Igboariam, Amanuke, Nteje, Nando, Umuleri and Awkuzu. One son of Eri was said to have gone to Igala country.<sup>6</sup> The political life of Aguleri was controlled by warrior kings derived from Umu Ezeora of Enugu Aguleri. Again, more ethnographical and archaeological work is essential to clarify the events of this period.<sup>7</sup> According to Anambra history, after the death of Eri a series of migrations followed.

III The migration and the unification periods: probably c. 1042–1252.

### (a) *Nri Ifikuanim*

The history goes on to tell how the children of Eri migrated to different places. Ogbodudu migrated from Aguleri to Amanuke; Onogu to Igboariam; Onoja to Igala; Iguedo to Umuleri, Nando, Awkuzu, Nteje and maybe Nsugbe. Agulu remained at Aguleri. From this point each settlement pursued its own separate existence and development, owing allegiance to Aguleri, where the collective ancestral temple of Eri still stands to this day.

Nri, one of the sons of Eri, called Ifikuanim by Agukwu-Nri 'historians', eventually left Aguleri

and migrated southwards through Amanuke and settled at the present site of Enugu-ukwu. At Enugu-ukwu he bore a child who became the progenitor of Enugu-ukwu, Nneofia and Enugu-Agidi. Nri Ifikuanim left the Enugu site and went down the valley near the lake site and established the present town of Agukwu. At Agukwu he took the title of Nri and became Eze Nri of Agukwu. According to tradition, Nri Ifikuanim held sway over a number of settlements around Nri such as Enugu-ukwu, Nneofia, Enugu-Agidi, Nimo, Nibo, Nisi and Agulu. He authorized Nri men to confer *Ozo* titles, which are minor to but similar to the Nri title, upon leaders of the neighbouring settlements. Markets and shrines of various supernatural beings were established. He insisted that settlements should live in peace and to this end he proclaimed the rules of abomination which should be observed in order that peace and order might prevail. Above all, he introduced new varieties of yam which he had brought from Aguleri, and made Nri men distribute them to various settlements. The sacred yam cult called *Ifejioke* was also given to the people. He established the *Agbala* Nri oracle, which was believed to bring health and prosperity to those who sought its aid. It was believed that Nri Ifikuanim had control over the elements, diseases, insect pests, trading activities and fertility. It was also believed that he could curse people or settlements that did not obey his orders, and that his curse was very effective; hence it was dreaded.

Nri Ifikuanim was said to have acquired all these powers from his father Eri, who secretly revealed to him the secrets of the 'mystical world' and gave to him two sets of paraphernalia called *Nri Menri*. The first set consisted of two staffs called *Ofo Nri* and *Alo Nri*. These staffs are today believed to have been transferred from one Nri to the next from the time of Nri Ifikuanim. The second set of paraphernalia consisted of objects made of bronze, iron and clay. This set was always buried in the ground where the temple and shrine of *Nri Menri* stood. Since the foundation of Nri kingships, Eze Nri has had to go to Aguleri during his coronation to get a lump of clay, from the bottom of the Anambra, with which the pot of *Nri Menri* is made, as the original was buried during the time of Nri Ifikuanim. Also, every Eze Nri has had to employ smiths and wood carvers, who work in a secret grove, to cast and make the various

bronze and iron objects associated with Nri kingship. These objects are consecrated and buried with the pots in the ground where the shrine of *Nri Menri* is located. Since every Eze Nri had his own shrine and the temple of *Nri Menri* was located near his palace, and since each past Eze Nri was selected from different lineages situated in different parts of Nri town, it follows that the temples of the past *Nri Menri* were in different locations in Nri.

Nri Ifikuanim bore many children and the principal ones who stayed in Nri founded the present three maximal lineages of Agukwu, now called Agbadana or Umu Onyiora, Uruoji or Umu Alikenri, Obeagu or Umu Nribuife. (See Maps 8, 9 and 10.)

Before Nri Ifikuanim died he proclaimed that only the youngest sons could take the Nri title. This proclamation was made because the *Ofo* of the temple called *Ofo Okpala* and the *Ofo* of Nri Menri called *Ofo Nri* must not be held by one person or be kept under one roof. Thus was established the custom that first sons, who inherit the *ofo okpala* and temples of their fathers, are debarred from becoming the Eze Nri, while last sons, who inherit the huts of their mothers, *Mkpuke*, can become the Eze Nri.

Immediately after the death of Nri Ifikuanim a catastrophic event that must have hampered the development of the Agukwu settlement is said to have occurred. While Onyiora, the first son of Nri Ifikuanim, was engaged in performing the mortuary rites of his father, his brother Alikenri hastily took the *Ozo* title. By this act he became entitled to inherit the domestic and personal temple of Nri Ifikuanim.

The estate of Nri Ifikuanim was divided up thus: Onyiora inherited the supernatural being called *Ifejioke* and the cult of *Afo* market day called *Afo*, and the *Udo* and the *Ana* cults. Alikenri inherited the domestic temple *Obu* and the *ofo ozo* staff of Nri Ifikuanim and the cult of the *Oye* market day. The youngest son, Ogboo, inherited the cults of *Nkwo* and *Eke* market days, the cult of the year called *Aro* and the Nri title. Similarly, Nri Ifikuanim's land was divided into three.

Onyiora was very angry with his brother Alikenri, who made peace moves which Onyiora accepted. So a general proclamation was made in which it

was clearly stated: 'Only first sons, *Okpala*, will from henceforth inherit the temples of their fathers. Temples must never change hands. The first to be *Ozo* will be the chief priest of the temple and *Alusi* only.' Thus the *Ofo Ozo* and the *Ofo Okpala* were separated. To this day temples are inherited by the rule of primogeniture. Meanwhile, Ogboo, the third and youngest son, died and the throne of Agukwu was vacant for his youngest son, Nribuife.

#### (b) *Nri Namoke*

As the Agukwu settlement founded by Nri Ifikuanim was expanding, his brother's son Namoke Ogbodudu migrated from Amanuke and established a settlement beside the Agulu lake a few miles from Agukwu. This newcomer to the area is said to have introduced a new power structure that was destined to direct the course of the future development of Nri politics. This will be discussed later. Nri Namoke was the son of Ogbodudu of Amanuke, who was the son of Eri, the founder of Eri clans in the Anambra valley. It should be noted that, during his migration to Nri, through Enugu-ukwu, Ifikuanim went through Amanuke, his brother's territory. Namoke, the son of Ogbodudu of Amanuke, became Nri after claiming to have derived inspiration from his grandfather Eri. He migrated from Amanuke to a place that was a few miles west of Agukwu. This place was already inhabited by a group of people called Nsekpe and Achalla. The new migrants amalgamated with the original inhabitants and called themselves Diodo, and thus Nri Namoke became the Nri of Diodo.

Ogboo, the son of Nri Ifikuanim, married a classificatory daughter of Nri Namoke, who was in fact a brother's daughter to Nri Namoke. The children of Nri Namoke's brother's daughter are today regarded in Nri kinship as sister's sons. Thus a kind of mother's brother – sister's son relationship was established between Nri Namoke's descendants and the descendants of Ogboo. One of the sister's sons of Nri Namoke, called Nribuife, lived with him when Nri Namoke's children abandoned him and migrated to found the present Oreri and Ovolo towns. These children secretly moved some of Nri Namoke's paraphernalia. Thus Oreri was founded as an independent Nri kingdom.

This greatly distressed Nri Namoke, who while



dying transferred his *Ofo* and *Alo* staffs to his sister's son, Nribuife, who was then living with him. Nri Namoke said 'Take these *Ofo* and *Alo* and become king of Diodo. Do not return it. Curse be on any Diodo man who ever takes the title of Nri. As they abandoned me, so has kingship abandoned them for ever.' Nribuife settled in Diodo and became king of Diodo.

But before the arrival of Nri Namoke and Nri Ifikuanim in this part of Igbo land, the present town of Nri was already inhabited by a people who claimed autochthony. They are now called Umu Dim or Umu Diana, that is, the children of the aboriginal inhabitants. Their great leader, who was probably contemporaneous with Nri Ifikuanim and Nri Namoke, was Ezikanebo, to whom we shall now turn.

#### (c) *Ezeikanebo Adama*

Ezikanebo was the son of Ireme. The Umu Diana claim to be the original inhabitants of the lake and forest area before the immigrants Nri Ifikuanim and Nri Namoke came to join them. It is evident that these new immigrants brought new ideas such as the *ozo* title and new varieties of yam.

According to the Agukwu-Nri tradition, Nri Ifikuanim conferred the *ozo* title on Ezikanebo and gave him his daughter to marry. The duty of Eze Nri's daughter, who had to be a virgin, was to serve the Eze Nri of Agukwu. The prerogative was transferred to the children of Eze Nri's daughter. Thus the Umu Diana gained the right and privilege to be the only people on earth who can touch the Eze Nri and serve as palace officers in his inner-chamber. To this day the Umu Diana people not only provide the palace officers who have the prerogative to touch the Eze Nri, but also receive the shares of a daughter when meat is served in the palace of Eze Nri. The Umu Diana also receive certain parts of the meat that indicate that they 'own the land', and perform the coronation and burial of any Eze Nri.

After Ezikanebo's death his lineages ramified and several temples were formed. As a result of this ramification, Enuora, Agbana and Urofolo became major lineages, each having its temple and all subordinate to Ezikanebo, which is today one of the three *Ofo*-giving temples in Nri. The marriage alliance between Umu Diana and Agukwu was crucial to the process of the unification of the three settlements into a strong federation in

which each unit still maintains its autonomy in several ways. This unification was made by Nribuife, whose reign we shall now deal with in detail.<sup>8</sup>

#### (d) *Eze Nribuife*

Nribuife became the king of Diodo after the death of his mother's brother. He lived in Diodo. Earlier on, his father had died and so the *Ofo* and *Alo* of his grandfather, Nri Ifikuanim, were given to him, he being the youngest living son of Ogboo.<sup>9</sup> Thus Nribuife became the Eze Nri of Diodo and Agukwu, and through the prerogative given to the Umu Diana lineage as a result of the marriage alliance between Ezikanebo and Nri Ifikuanim, he became the sole ruler of the three settlements. Thus the three settlements called Diodo, Akamkpisi and Agukwu were unified by a process that culminated in the coronation of Nribuife.

To consolidate his position, Nribuife was said to have appointed twelve senior *Ozo* men, four each from the three sections of the settlement, to help him in the government of the entire settlements. These men were called *Ndi Ichie Ukwu* or *Nzemabua*. It was arranged that the Agukwu section of the settlement must always pay tribute to Eze Nri, while the Diodo and Akamkpisi sections must never pay tribute to Eze Nri, because of the special kinship relationship existing between Nribuife and Diodo people on the one hand and Agukwu and Umu Diana on the other hand. This practice is maintained to this day. Hence the saying 'Tribute should be given to Eze Nri and Eze Nri should give tribute to the Adama.' It was also decided that the kingship could circulate among the maximal lineages of Obeagu, Uruoji and Agbadana in the order Obeagu-Uruoji-Agbadana, to make sure that Diodo would never attempt to seize the throne.

This period of unification and consolidation might have been a painful process, as indicated by the series of compromises reached between the three sections of the settlements and among the three maximal lineages of Agukwu. The external influence of Nri at this period was limited to the settlements at Aguleri, Amanuke, Enugu-ukwu, Enugu-Agidi, Nneofia and other settlements around. Indeed the period of explosive expansion of Nri influence was yet to come. According to their history, this happened in the next period which is considered to be the culmination of the hegemony.

#### IV The culmination of Nri hegemony: probably c. A.D. 1252-1676.

Much energy and time was devoted in the previous period toward the unification of peoples of diverse origin. This period, which spans the reign of six kings, the fourth to the ninth – four named and two unnamed – was characterized by a rapid expansion of Nri people into various areas of Igbo land. One Nri local 'historian' summed it up thus: 'After Nribuife, the Nri spread out into Igbo land like soldier ants'.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps there was a proliferation of Nri lineages, spreading into different parts of Igbo land. Nri lineages were established in the oldest Igbo settlements. The kings that reigned during this period are shown in Table 1. I shall briefly discuss each reign.

##### *Eze Nri (his name forgotten)*

Uruoji maximal lineage supplied the fourth Eze Nri of this period. Oral tradition does not give the name of the Eze Nri. Nri oral tradition is emphatic that an Eze Nri ruled, but his name is forgotten because his lineage was extinct and he had no temple. This reign was followed by the reign of Nrijiifo.

##### *Eze Nri Nrijiifo*

Nrijiifo was considered a great king who brought prosperity to Igbo settlements through the spread of cults associated with the accumulation of wealth, especially the Ikenga cult. The tradition says that Nri influence extended as far as Nsukka, Owerri, Okigwe, Kwalie and Agbor areas. The only evidence that seems to support the claim indirectly is the occurrence of Nri lineages at Ute and Owa near Agbor and Nsukka area, but it is not yet possible to determine when these lineages settled there.<sup>11</sup> Nrijiifo was succeeded by another Eze Nri whose name has also been forgotten.

##### *Eze Nri (his name forgotten)*

The name of the Nri of this period is not definitely known, but there was no doubt that he came from Obeagu maximal lineage. Some elders hold that he might have died while performing the coronation ceremony; others argue that he reigned but that his lineage became extinct a long time ago. The reign of this unnamed Eze Nri was followed by that of Nri Anyamata.

##### *Eze Nri Anyamata*

This was another Nri who probably reigned during the period shown in Table 1. Nri Anyamata was

from Uruoji maximal lineage, but his specific minimal lineage is unknown, which means that his lineage became extinct a long time ago. However, his reign was considered remarkable in that it was associated with a period of long drought followed by famine all over Igbo land. Nri Anyamata's reign was followed by that of a remarkable king called Nri Fenenu.

##### *Eze Nri Fenenu*

Nri Fenenu was of Diegelem minimal lineage of Agbadana maximal lineage. He was renowned for his great mystical power which made Nri famous and respected over a large portion of Igbo land. He is said to have lived for one hundred years and until then could not die. It was believed that he 'flew up a tree', and this myth is used to demonstrate his great mystical power. The members of his minimal lineage were so apprehensive during his reign that they decided to refrain temporarily from providing aspirants for the office of Eze Nri. It is also believed that most of the Nri lineages west of the Niger at Ogwashi-ukwu, Ogboli Issele-ukwu and Illah were founded during the reign of his successor, Eze Nri Agu.

Table 1.  
Eze Nri and Approximate Reign Periods

King Lists	Approximate beginning of reigns	Approximate reign periods	Reign Interval Years
Eri	A.D. 948	A.D. 949-1041	93
1st Nri Ifikuanim	A.D. 1042	A.D. 1043-1158	116
2nd Nri Namoke	A.D. 1090	A.D. 1090-1158	69
3rd Nri Buife	A.D. 1159	A.D. 1159-1252	93
4th Nri (name forgotten)	A.D. 1253	A.D. 1253-1299	46
5th Nri Nrijiifo	A.D. 1300	A.D. 1300-1370	70
6th Nri (name forgotten)	A.D. 1371	A.D. 1371-1464	93
7th Nri Anyamata	A.D. 1465	A.D. 1465-1511	46
8th Nri Fenenu	A.D. 1512	A.D. 1512-1582	70
9th Nri Agu	A.D. 1583	A.D. 1583-1676	93
10th Nri Alike and Nri Apia	A.D. 1677	A.D. 1677-1700	23
11th Nri Ezimilo	A.D. 1701	A.D. 1701-1723	22
12th Nri Ewenetem	A.D. 1724	A.D. 1724-1794	70
13th Nri Enweleana	A.D. 1795	A.D. 1795-1888	93
14th Nri Obalike	A.D. 1889	A.D. 1889-1935	54
15th Nri Nrijiifo II	A.D. 1936	A.D. 1936-present	

(Dates obtained by genea-chronological principles described in the beginning of this Chapter).



*Eze Nri Agu*

Eze Nri Agu will continue to be the enigma of Nri political history. Nri Agu was of Obeagu maximal lineage. To the Umu Nri lineage of Obeagu he should be a forgotten personality because his reign was riddled with problems, for he had no temple. The tradition holds that the beginning of Eze Nri Agu's reign was successful but that he ended his days in abomination. He found the austere life of the Eze Nri very unbearable and so decided to abandon Nri. He and his followers secretly left Nri, followed the south-west course of the river Idemmili, which has its main source in the two lakes flanking Nri town, and founded a chiefly lineage at Oraukwu. Some of his children went to Oteri, Neni and Nnewi. Others crossed the Niger to Ogboli Nri Agu and Ogwashi-ukwu (Ogwa Nri Agukwu).<sup>12</sup>

One important and notable event in the reign of Nri Agu was the increase in trade and wealth in Nri. It was also the end of a period in Nri kingship, as indicated in the events that took place in the reign of Nri Agu's successors. According to Nri local 'historians', the greatness of Nri was reached during the reign of Nri Agu: 'the trouble began with Nri Apia and Nri Alike.'

#### V The period of the decline and collapse of Nri hegemony: probably c. 1677-1936

The period of the decline began from Eze Nri Apia and Nri Alike who ruled Nri simultaneously, and ended at the interregnum of Eze Nri Obalike who ruled from A.D. 1889 - 1936. Four Eze Nri reigned during this period of decline and collapse.

#### *Eze Nri Alike and Nri Apia, c. A.D. 1677-1770*

Nri Alike and Nri Apia were both from the maximal lineage of Uruoji. Eze Nri Alike was from the major lineage of Umu Anuta, while Nri Apia was from the major lineage of Umu Nribuzo. Both aspirants claimed spiritual inspiration to be Eze Nri at the same time. They were both wealthy and had plenty of money, wives, land and followers. Nri people could not control them. Both were crowned Eze Nri. This caused great distress and disunity in the town and Nri influence was badly damaged by this split. They reigned for about twenty years and both were said to have died in the same week: one on *Oye* day and the other on *Eke* day. Thus ended a period which Nri historians considered 'a period of great disorder'.

One essential feature of the reign of Nri Alike and Nri Apia was that their reign was associated with the growth of traffic in slaves with the coastal peoples. They were believed to have defined the status of a slave. A slave was declared an unfortunate human being held in captivity. It was therefore abomination to kill or bleed a slave. They could be sold but never killed or bled. According to Nri elders, that is why to this day in Nri town there are no persons considered as slaves, *Oru*, or ritual slaves, *Osu*, as in the other Igbo towns. Nri town was considered a sanctuary to all human beings who could come into it. Runaway slaves were considered free once they set foot on Nri soil. Persons who committed an abomination that involved hanging were freed and purified once they set foot on Nri soil.<sup>13</sup> The degradation of Nri kingship by Nri Alike and Nri Apia had immediate consequences in the reigns of their successors.

#### *Eze Nri Ezimilo, c. A.D. 1701-1723*

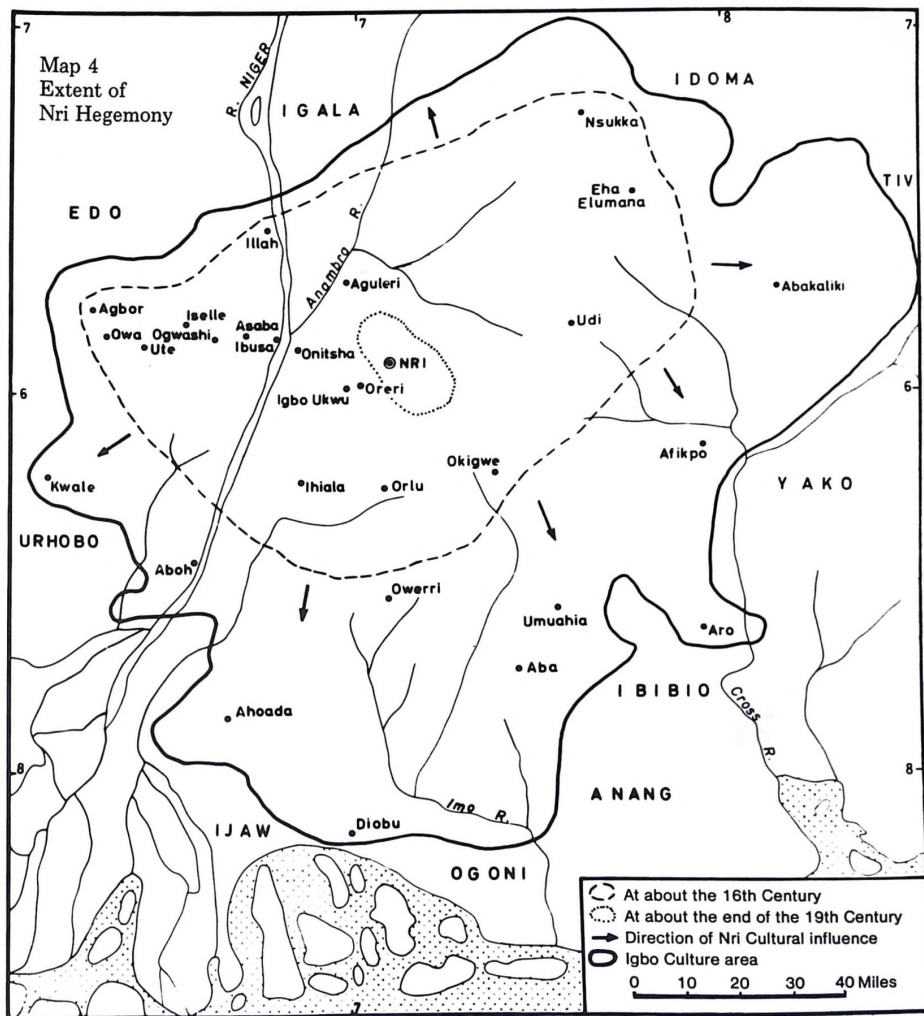
Nri Ezimilo of Umu Nrijiogo lineage of Agbadana maximal lineage grew up at Asaba on the west bank of the river Niger, where he was acting as an agent of Eze Nri. He returned to Nri to become Eze Nri and was successfully crowned. After reigning for nearly a decade he was unintentionally murdered by an armed robber from a lineage in Enugu-ukwu who unknowingly came into the Eze's palace to steal. This was regarded as one of the greatest abominations in Igbo land.

According to Nri tradition, a year after the murder, Igbo land was struck with hunger and famine. The lineage of the murderer was compelled by Nri and Igbo settlements to go to Nri to atone. This was done and peace and harmony were restored. But the damage done to the reputation of Nri by the murder of their king was irreparable. Ezimilo was succeeded by his son Ewenetem, contrary to the rule of circulating succession.

#### *Eze Nri Ewenetem: c. A.D. 1724-1794*

The sudden and untimely death by murder of Nri Ezimilo which coincided with the occurrence of great famine all over Igbo land made Igbo settlements under Nri send delegations to Nri court, demanding that the son of Ezimilo should succeed to his father's throne without an interregnum and without the formalities of long coronations which would, in their belief, prolong the famine.

It was suggested that members of Agbadana



maximal lineages sold this idea to the neighbouring Igbo settlements who brought pressure to bear on the council of *Ndi Nze Nri*. The council yielded to the pressure and Ewenetem was made king of Nri by proclamation. It was announced: 'The power of Ezimilo has gone into Ewenetem.' This is the only case in Nri history in which kingship passed from father to son and this

was the last time it was done by proclamation.

Ewenetem was rich and young. He decided to move his maximal lineage, the people of Agbadana, from the old site where his father was killed to a new promising site. The move was made, but a section of the maximal lineage joined their distant relations living with Enugu-ukwu. They are at present Irunebo of Enugu-ukwu.

Tradition says that the slave trade was rampant in Igbo land during this period. Like his predecessors, Nri Alike and Nri Apia, Nri Ewenetem reaffirmed the enactment concerning the status of slaves.

By this time the new Aro settlements of NdiKel-ionwu, Ndiokpaleze, etc., located about twenty miles south-east of Nri, had been founded by Aro and their slave raiding activities were beginning to be felt.

On the west of the Niger, Benin and Agbor influences were felt. The Benin-Ubuluku was had pushed some Igbo west of the Niger to the east. It was then that Onitsha and Oguta and some of the riverain Igbo settlements were founded. Similarly, most of the Nsukka towns, Eha-Alumona, Nsukka-Asadu and Nibo, which were Nri settlements under Eze Nri, were subjugated under the invading Igala.<sup>14</sup>

The struggle for the existence of Nri hegemony had reached its peak, but Nri continued with the old system based on rituals. No attempt was made to militarize the system until during the reign of Nri Enweleana. (See Map 4).

*Eze Nri Enweleana: c. A.D. 1795-1888*

After the death of Ewenetem, his son Nwamkpo proclaimed that he had spiritual inspiration to be Eze Nri. This proclamation angered the council of *Ndi Nze*, who turned against him. The council divested Nwamkpo of his *ozo* title and proclaimed him an impostor. He was also fined twenty cows for violating the rules of circulating succession.

Nri Enweleana who challenged Nwamkpo was crowned Eze Nri. Nri Enweleana was from Umu Ezekamadu of Obeagu maximal lineage. He carried out two brave deeds that immortalized his name in the annals of Nri political history. He relentlessly opposed the brutal activities of the notorious Aro slave dealer, Okolie Ijoma of NdiKelionwu. He sent his agents to dissuade Ijoma from provoking Igbo settlements to fight one another by supplying them with arms and mercenaries from Abam, Abriba and Ohaffia. Ijoma was said to have denied the allegation and argued that he was a trader who earned his living by meeting the demands of people, and that how they used the goods he supplied was not his business. For years the negotiation continued. Eze Nri became impatient and pronounced an anathema on Ijoma. Ijoma was forced to repent

and peace was negotiated. According to tradition, Ijoma promised to inform Eze Nri before any settlement attacked another so that Nri men in those settlements could withdraw to a neutral place.<sup>15</sup>

The Eze Nri was not satisfied with the peace agreement made with Ijoma, for it was obvious that Aro incursion could not be contained simply by a religious curse. Eze Nri proclaimed the raiding of towns an abomination and organized a military alliance of neighbouring towns that paid tribute to him. This alliance was called the first *Anakom*. The settlements in this alliance included Awka, Nibo, Nise, Amawobia, Uguoba, Enugu-Agidi, Ebenebe, Ukpo and Amansi. At first this military alliance worked out as planned, because the Aro aggression was successfully checked at Awka and Agulu by the combined forces of the members of the alliance. But the alliance gradually dissolved when the Aro directed their raids to Orlu and Ihiala area, distant areas in the south of Nri. This was the first time in the history of Nri that an Eze Nri is said to have advocated the use of force in his sphere of influence. One Nri 'historian' called it 'a mushroom attempt for, after all, it is abomination to kill any human being even in war.'

It is obvious that Nri influence in Igbo land was under pressure economically and militarily. Even in the ritual field the authority of Nri was weakened by the growth of the Aro Chukwu oracle, which not only challenged but then superseded the Nri oracle called the Agbala Nri, because the Aro oracle was backed by military force and was situated in one of the strategic trade-routes between the coast and the Igbo hinterland.

All these facts were probably clear to Eze Nri Enweleana; hence he attempted to organize a military alliance against the Aro. But many factors inhibited the growth of militarism in Nri. This will be discussed in a later chapter.

The death of Nri Enweleana was followed by a very long interregnum during which Obeagu maximal lineage and Uruoji maximal lineage of Agukwu were engaged in a long fight which took six months to quell.<sup>16</sup> The *Nzemabua* fined all the Ochaka age-grade who had initiated the fighting. The inability of *Nzemabua* and *Ndi Nze* councils to stop the fighting which Eze Nri could have stopped simply by sounding his iron gong was indicative of the problems facing the state at

that period. The *Nzemabua* therefore encouraged the speedy coronation of Eze Nri Obalike of Uruoji maximal lineage between 1889 and 1890.

*Eze Nri Obalike, A.D. 1889–1935*

Between 1889 and 1890 Obalike became the king of Nri. He was from the Umu Nri Omalo of Uruoji. During the beginning of his reign, although the slave trade had declined considerably, its debasing effects on the moral values and attitudes towards human life had rocked the very foundation of the Nri hegemony. The hegemony had contracted to include only areas immediately around Nri.<sup>17</sup>

In 1905 the British took over the administration of Southern Nigeria and in 1911 Nri activities were banned and Nri Obalike was desecrated. Nri Obalike died on September 13th, 1927. The history of the struggle between Eze Nri Obalike and the British administrators and their missionary allies who were behind the final destruction of Nri influence is narrated in Chapter 10. The remains of the non-sacred paraphernalia of Eze Nri Obalike and his predecessor Eze Nri Enweleana, which were recovered after the Nigerian civil war, are today preserved in the Odinanani museum in Nri.<sup>18</sup> We now turn to the present Eze Nri, whose reign may be considered as a reign of revival after the dismal reign of Nri Obalike.

VII The period of revival, 1934 – the present  
*Eze Nrijofo II: 1936 – the present*

Many changes had begun to take place in Nri during the reign of Nri Obalike. The local government system introduced in 1905 was modified in 1934 during the interregnum of Obalike, who was considered to be still ruling according to Nri tradition. His palace officials performed their duties and his son Oko acted as Regent. But Oko fell out with Obalike's council of *Nzemabua*, who suspended him and made the head of the *Nzemabua* act in the place of the late Eze Nri.

Before the introduction in 1934 of changes in the local administration, it was rumoured that the British administration had the intention of making Eze Nri a paramount chief. Indeed, this would have taken place but for the warnings given by C.K. Meek, one of the government anthropologists, who did not fully understand the Nri system.<sup>19</sup>

In Nri, the effect of this rumour was to generate competition for the vacant throne. Indeed, according to the rules of Nri circulating succession,

it was the turn of Agbadana maximal lineage to supply a candidate by spiritual inspiration for the throne after the interregnum, which should last for at least seven years. But before the expiry of the interregnum in about 1931, Okpoko of the maximal lineage of Obeagu declared himself ritually inspired and he performed the coronation ceremonies of becoming Eze Nri.

In spite of opposition from Uruoji and Agbadana, Okpoko proclaimed himself Eze Nri. Tabansi Udene of Agbadana declared himself ritually inspired and by 1937 he had finished the coronation ceremonies associated with becoming Eze Nri. He was proclaimed Eze Nri by his supporters and he became Eze Nri Jimofo II. The political struggle that followed is discussed in Chapter 8. Here it is sufficient to say that Nrijofo II of Agbadana won the struggle when in 1944 the Uruoji people transferred the *ofa* and *alo* from Obalike's palace to Nrijofo II. His reign saw the revival of Nri kingship in a new setting.

The political system which Eze Nrijofo II operated between 1937 and 1972, and also that operated by Eze Nri Obalike and Eze Nri Enweleana, which are clearly remembered, will be the point of departure in this study. But since Nri past ascendancy in some parts of Igbo land was based on the control of certain religious and economic beliefs and practices, I will examine Nri religious and economic systems in the next two chapters.

## CHAPTER TWO: NOTES

1. I am referring to scholars such as B. Davidson, D.F. McCall, R. Oliver, J. Vansina, K.O. Dike, A.J. Alagoa, E. Sapir, N.R. Bennett, D.C. Forde, P. Kaberry, R. Bradbury, O. Ikime, A.E. Afigbo, S.O. Biobaku, J.F. Ajayi and G.I. Jones.

2. A detailed description of this method has been made in an unpublished paper, *The Chronology and History of Nri*. The Leo Frobenius Institute and UNESCO have jointly published an expanded version of *Nri History* in *Symposium Leo Frobenius*.

3. The concept of generational interval as defined by J. Vansina in his book *Oral Tradition*, is inadequate to cope with the variations that occur in the total genealogies of a given society. Hence I used a new concept, called total generational interval, to distinguish it from that used by Vansina. (Vansina, 1964, p. 63).

4. The Nri local 'historians' roughly distinguish these periods in their narrative by using statements like: 'During the time of Eri, when Eri was ruling the Anambra, etc.' Of all my Nri



informants, only Odenigbo of Uruoji, Anidomaka of Uruoji, Akunne of Obeagu and Okonkwo of Agbadana were able to narrate Nri history in detail with some degree of systematization. Others will remember bits of history according to the nature of their general interest. (See Appendix 4 – List of Informants).

All oral traditions used in this account were collected by me from about forty-one informants, of which twenty-three are from Nri town. The traditions have been cross-checked with evidence other than oral traditions such as behaviour patterns, linguistic evidence such as naming patterns, settlement patterns, archaeology and material cultures. (See Appendix 1).

Some variations occur in the versions collected, but they do not alter the main structure of the stories. If three versions occur, they are all recorded and the version that is corroborated by other evidence is used as the most likely to have occurred. (See Appendix 1 for a sample of the corroboration chart used in cross-checking major information obtained from oral traditions).

5. Oral traditions collected from Nri and Aguleri. (See Appendix 4).

6. I do not hold the view that Aguleri or Nri people are Igala. There is evidence to support the view that there were Igbo-Igala contacts in the past made easy by river communication. Oral traditions were collected from Aguleri, Nnando, Amanuke, Igboriam, Nteji, Awkuzu, Umuleri and Nri. Variations do occur but all are agreed about these being children of Eri who came down the river Anambra.

The daughter of Eri was Iguedo. The number of the children of Iguedo differs; some included Ogbunike and Nsugbe.

The Nri historians seem to be more positive and detailed in their accounts than the 'historians' of other towns because their past role in the Igbo culture area, which involved ritual and political, derived its validation in events believed to have happened in the past.

7. Idigo described Eri as a warrior king. This version was rejected at Nri and by some Aguleri elders, who said that Eri bore Onoja Oboli who went to live in his mother's land in Igala.

Boston in his book *The Igala Kingdom* says: 'The third group, holding the priestly title of Obajadaka, claims descent from Onoja Obori, one of the protodynastic royal ancestors whose relationship to Ayagba is obscure...there is one school of thought in the royal clan that regards him as *omonobule* or uterine kinsman rather than a full member by agnatic descent.' (Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 1968, p. 49).

There seems to be a weak indirect confirmation of Nri and Aguleri traditions by Boston's findings about the status and role of the Onoja Oboli clan in Igala, which is similar to that of Nri.

The oral traditions were collected from Umu Ezeora, Aguleri in 1967 and 1971. Also partly recorded by M.C.M. Idigo, *The History of Aguleri*, Yaba, 1955).

8. For the use of the word 'federated' settlements, see M. Onwuejiegwu's paper: 'The Typology of Settlement Patterns in the Igbo Culture Area' in *African Notes*, Bulletin of IAS, University of Ibadan, Vol. 6, Number 1, 1970, pp. 60–69.

9. Nribufe being a structurally significant father had displaced Ogbom in the genealogical level. Only two of my informants, Anidumake and Nwaokoye Odenigbo, stressed the point that Nribufe was a grandson of Nri Ifikuani. (See Chapter 6 on equality and inequality of lineages). In 1975 some Diodo elite

denounced the oral tradition of Nri Mamoke cursing his kinsmen who abandoned him. But the version that Mamoke did curse was recorded by writers of 1910–1934 e.g. M.D.W. Jeffreys.

10. Nri 'historians' regard this period as 'Oge Nri bu Nri', meaning literally 'When Nri was real Nri'.

11. An Agbor local historian says that the early kings of Agbor were called *Nze* and established the basic religion and social structure of Agbor many centuries before Agbor came in direct conflict with Benin in the eighteenth century. (See Iduwe, *A Short History of Agbor*). A recent study by Ibegbulem at Ute-Okpu supports the Nri origin of the settlement. A genealogy of up to nine generations was reported. *Kingship in Ute-Okpu*, unpublished undergraduate dissertation, University of Benin, Nigeria, 1978.

12. Oral traditions collected from Oraukwu, Neni, Ogwashi-ukwu and Ogboli-Ibusa claim they are descendants of Nri Agu. The Ogboli Ibusa genealogy seems to support this view. (*The traditional political system of Ibusa*, M.A. Onwuejiegwu, 1973).

13. It is indeed very significant that Nri people have no status differentiation based on free-born and slaves or ritual slaves. I have closely investigated whether persons of slave or ritual slave descent are regarded as a separate class of people. I found no evidence that this is so. Instead, I found that persons whose ancestors were engaged in the slave trade, in which the slaves were said to have died as a result of hardship imposed by their ancestors, were ordered to offer sacrifices of purification for the abomination. Slaves were completely absorbed into Nri lineage without limitations to their rights as full citizens. This outstanding character of Nri towards slaves seems probably singular in the Igbo culture area. To be 'Nri' means to be 'free'. Hence to be resident in Nri is to be of ritual 'royalty', a superior being, so to speak. Thus 'abominable' children became clean on being brought to Nri. Nri attitudes towards the slave trade, in which they of course participated, may also be interpreted as a ritual and diplomatic way of fighting the Aro who encroached on Nri sphere of influence.

14. Traditions collected from Oguda family in Nsukka Asadu; confirmed by traditions from Nri. (See Appendix 4).

15. Captain John Adam's report in 1823 about the attitude of slavers towards a class of Igbo slaves called 'men with Ichi marks' showed that the number of Nri men captured into slavery was considerable. This would have caused great concern in Nri courts. The tradition of long negotiations between Ijoma and Eze Nri and the alliance made against Ijoma by Eze Nri seem to be indirectly corroborated by observations made by Captain John Adam. (Adam, *Remarks on the country extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo, including observations on the manners and customs of the inhabitants*, 1823, pp. 129–134).

16. Fighting of this type did not involve killing. Fists, clubs, wooden swords and stones were used. Only young men of the opposing lineages were involved.

17. 90% of the towns mentioned by A.G. Leonard were confirmed by my enquiries. (Leonard, *The Lower Niger and its Peoples*, 1968 edition, pp. 34–37).

18. M.A. ONWUEJIEGWU, *A Short History of Nri Museum*.

19. MEEK, Intelligence Report on Native Administration.



## Chapter 3

# The Cosmology and Religious Beliefs of Nri and their Political Relevance

The hegemony that the Nri people established over certain areas of the Igbo culture area and the state system they operated was based on the premise that through the instrument of religious beliefs human beings were disciplined into obeying a higher supernatural authority who was believed to dwell physically in Nri town. This earthly supernatural being was the Eze Nri. In order to comprehend how this system worked it is essential to delve briefly into the nature of Nri cosmology and religious beliefs, and the nature of the beliefs they shared in common with other Igbo peoples, some of whom they dominated ritually and, to some extent, politically.

The traditional cosmology and religious beliefs of the Nri are interwoven and centred around five interdependent concepts, summarized in the diagram of Figure 3. They are as follows:

- Chukwu* – the Great Creator of all things
- Alusi* – the invisible supernatural being and/or forces.
- Nmuo* – the invisible spirits of the dead
- Uwa* – the visible world
- Ike Nmadu* – the power in the individual person that drives him into action.

Here, I shall only give a brief description of each category of concepts and how they are related to one another, and their relevance in the political sphere.

### *Chukwu*

According to Nri priests, *Chukwu* is the Great Creator of all beings, forces and things both visible and invisible.<sup>1</sup> The Great Creator has four major aspects, which are manifestations of his existence. First, *Chukwu* is *Anyanwu*, which symbolically means the sun. As the sun's light is

everywhere so *Chukwu* is everywhere; as the sun is powerful so *Chukwu* is all-powerful; as the sun is the light that reveals things so *Chukwu* is the source of knowledge. Secondly, *Chukwu* is *Agbala* which is manifested in the fertility of the earth and beings that inhabit it. Thirdly, *Chukwu* is *chi* which is manifested in the power and ability of living beings to procreate themselves from generation to generation. Fourthly, *Chukwu* is *Okike*, that is creation, and is manifested in the creation of everything visible and invisible, which is a never-ending process.

*Chukwu* as *Okike* created the laws that govern the visible and the invisible. These laws are neither good nor bad, simply laws that enable things to work. But good and evil are the products of the invisible beings and forces which manipulate the laws for their own ends. These supernatural beings and forces are *Alusi*, to be discussed later. *Chukwu* can intervene to stop the laws from taking effect; hence *Chukwu* is called upon early in the morning and during rituals and when gifts and the sharing of kola nut and chalk are made.

Blood sacrifices are not offered to *Chukwu* and there is no temple or shrine for it. But aspects of *Chukwu* have shrines and bloody sacrifices are offered to each. The type of offering made to *Chukwu* is one made up of kola nut, white chalk and libations of palm and raffia wine. Thus, while breaking kola nut, the person points the kola nut to the sun and says:

### *Igbo*

- Chukwu Okike
- Anyanwu na Agbala
- Chi mmadu
- Wete Oji
- Wete ndu

### *English*

- The Great Creator
- Light and fertility
- Procreator of men
- Giver of kola nut
- Giver of life



An *ozo* man must have a shrine of *Anyanwu* and *Agbala* ritually installed in front of his temple – each is symbolized by a set of ritual trees growing in front of his temple as long as he is alive. Also every *ozo* man has a short elephant tusk which symbolizes his *Okike*. Every lineage has its founder's *Okike*, and during the tenth traditional month of Nri called *Onwa Okike*, the month of the creator, all the *ozo* men of each lineage gather their *Okike* in the lineage's temple and offer a blood sacrifice to it. (Plate 1).

Every man on having his first child plants a

ritual tree in the front of his house. This ritual tree *Ogbu chi* represents his *chi* and will be cut down the day he dies. The ritual tree symbolizes procreation (an aspect of creation) which *Chukwu* has given to all living beings, and it is manifested in a man when he begets his first child.

People who have acquired certain mystical knowledge and technique are believed to be able to evoke the aspect of *Chukwu* called *Agbala* that is also closely associated with *Anyanwu*. *Agbala* will reveal to them the secret of fecundity, health and happiness. Thus the *Agbala* cult was developed

Plate 1. *Nwaokoye Odinigbo, Isi Nze of Uruoji, consecrating elephant tusks for four ozo men who are taking the okike title.*



and called *Agbala Nze Nri*. This cult group is discussed in Chapter 7.

All these aspects of *Chukwu* are found in all Igbo towns in one form or another, and each has developed in various ways. But it is only at Nri that an elaborate 'mythology' of *Chukwu* is developed. All these aspects are contained in the creation myth, the coming of Eri, the introduction of yam, maize, cocoyam and vegetables, the introduction of metalwork, the introduction of the market days, and how death came to the earth. In the past it was the function of Nri people to install the shrines related to this aspect of *Chukwu* in most parts of Igbo land.

### *Alusi*

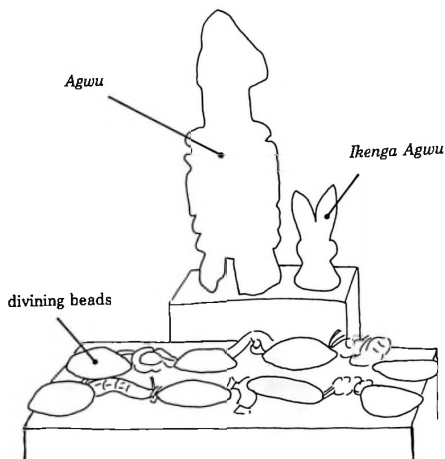
The *Alusi* are the invisible creations of *Chukwu*. They are considered to be the supernatural beings and/or forces that are the authors of good and evil. They manipulate the hidden laws made by *Chukwu* to produce good and evil, which they shower on to the visible world of men.

The Nri distinguish four types of *alusi*; those directly established by *Chukwu*, such as *Igwe*, the firmament; those established by Eri such as *Ana*, *Ajana*, *Ifejioku*, *Onuebo*, *Ede*, *Oye*, *Afo* and *Nkwo*; those established by the ancestors, such as *Idemili*, *Udo*, *Aro*, *Akwali omumu*, *Ngene*, *Ogugu*, *Oirimili*; those called *Agwu*. *Agwu* are ambivalent in their character – they reveal the secret of the invisible and visible world to traditional medicine men called *dibia*, in the mystical codes of divination called *afa*, and are also responsible for mental illness. (Plate 3 shows *Agwu* cult objects). These *alusi*, especially *Ike*, *Oyo*, *Afo* and *Nkwo* and those of the third and fourth types mentioned above, are considered to have human temperaments, which range from love to hatred. The *Alusi* mobilize and send different types of reward and revenge to men.

It is believed that each *Alusi* has certain specific negative and positive roles associated with it and that these roles influence the general welfare of human beings. For example, in Agukwu the *Alusi* called *Anwoye* is regarded as the mother of three *Alusi* called *Ngene* (male), *Ogugu* (female) and *Nwaoye* (female). *Ngene* gives or withholds money, wife and children. *Ogugu* gives husbands to, or withholds them from, women and also helps men to achieve or not to achieve their specific ambitions, such as taking a title. *Anwoye* gives children to



Plate 2. Ceremonial stool used by members of Eze Nri society.



Key to Plate 3





Plate 3. Agwu, the Alusi of divination, the ikenga of Agwu, and broad beads for divining.



childless persons or withholds the giving of children and it also drives away worthless spirits from disturbing a person. These *Alusi* children of *Anwoye* are also regarded as her messengers who carry out her instructions on whom to punish or reward.

All *Alusi* manifest their will through the *Alusi* called *Agwu* that determines the fall of the diviner's beads in *Afa* divination. The *Alusi* that have human temperaments and qualities have images, *nkwu*, to represent them. They have wives and children and followers. Some like *Eke* and *Iyiazi*

Some of the important *Alusi* have cults associated with them, and some have not. For example:

<i>Igwe</i>	the 'firmanent' as a supernatural force has no cult.
<i>Ana and Ajana</i>	the 'earth' as a supernatural force associated with the earth has a cult.
<i>Ifejioku</i>	the 'yam' as a supernatural force associated with the yam has a cult.

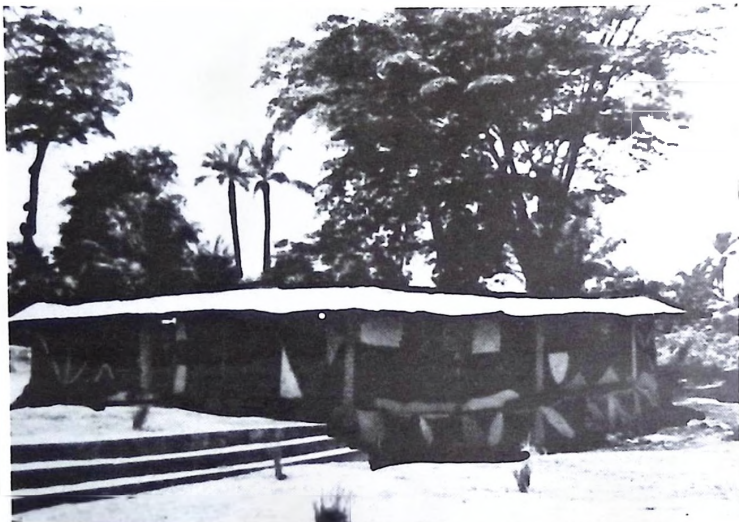


Plate 4. Temple of alusi called *Iyiazi*, in Agbadana, Nri.

are considered to have taken the *ozo* title and their images are dressed like *ozo* men. They are kept in big temples (see Plates 4, 5 and 6) and each has its own rituals. During the *Onwa Uzo Alusi*, the twelfth month of the Nri traditional calendar, daily rituals and offerings are made to the *Alusi* and wrestling matches and dances are organized before the temples. Some of the *Alusi* are regarded as invisible forces, and not as invisible beings, and so images are not made to represent them, but they can have shrines in which they are represented symbolically by mounds of earth, some pottery and ritual trees grown around the shrine. *Ana*, *Ajana*, *Ifejioku* *Onuebo* fall into this class.

<i>Eke, Oye, Afo Nkwo</i>	the 'market days', as supernatural beings associated with the markets, have cults.
<i>Idemili</i>	the 'water' of the earth as a supernatural force and being, associated with water, has a cult.
<i>Aro</i>	the 'year' as a supernatural force associated with the year, has a cult.
<i>Agwu</i>	the 'ambivalent' supernatural force, which is associated with medicine, divination and magic, has a cult.

Plate 5. Images of an Alusi of Uruofolo, shown as an ozo man with wife, daughter and ikenga.



Plate 6. Images of the Alusi of Eke, in Obeagu Nri.



This is not a complete list of all the *Alusi*, but is given as an example of the point I am making concerning *Alusi* regarded as a force or being, or both, on the one hand, and the *Alusi* that are associated with a cult and those without a cult on the other.

Of all these cults, the earth cult, the yam cult, the market cult, and the *agwu*-cult are dominant in Nri and in other Igbo settlements because they are tied to the economic functions of agriculture and trade. All these are communal cults in the sense that they belong to and represent the community. There are other individual cults associated with personal achievement in the field of farming, trade and industry (to be discussed later).

Some *Alusi* are used as oaths. During disputes individuals can swear on *Alusi* oaths. The *Alusi* is believed to strike the person who commits the offence. These oaths are administered by the priest of the *Alusi* in the presence of those whose duty it is to settle the dispute. The role of the *Alusi* in oath-taking, *iyi*, and in contractual relationship, *igba ndu*, is fully discussed in Chapter 8.

Both blood and non-blood sacrifices are offered to the *Alusi*, and each has its specific rites and procedures. *Alusi* are not worshipped, *ife*, but relationships are established with them; hence Nri people used the word *mmeye*, which means 'to open', in describing acts of sacrifice made to the *Alusi*. When an *Alusi*, especially one established by the ancestors, becomes too violent it might be considered necessary to abandon the violent *Alusi* by migrating to a new site and establishing a new type of *Alusi*. Each *Alusi* has a chief priest, *Eze Alusi*. In Chapter 6 I have shown how the principal *Alusi* of Nri are distributed amongst lineages of the wards, and in Chapter 8 how the control of the *Alusi*'s chief priest may generate political action.

Before 1911, in towns and settlements within the Nri hegemony, no-one dared make an *Alusi*, or rebuild its temple or transfer its temple to another spot without permission from Eze Nri. The chief priests of these *Alusi* were directly controlled from Nri. There are many types of *Alusi* in Igbo land and a settlement with less than twenty *Alusi* shrines may be regarded as a small settlement. To my knowledge every maximal lineage in Igbo land has at least five to ten *Alusi*, and the whole town may have up to six communal ones.<sup>2</sup> The *Alusi* concept is an important aspect of Igbo religion,

and most traditional Igbo believe that only Eze Nri can control these *Alusi* effectively. Hence Eze Nri is also referred to as *Eze Alusi*. Indeed, to control the *Alusi* of an Igbo town was to control an important aspect of the people's spiritual and temporal life. This was exactly the type of control and influence that Nri people had over many Igbo settlements, and that was observed and reported by Major Leonard,<sup>3</sup> 1895–1906, Father Duhaze,<sup>4</sup> 1906–1910, and Northcote Thomas,<sup>5</sup> 1910–1914. This aspect of control is analysed in Chapter 9, which deals with the external affairs of Nri.

### *Mmuo*

*Mmuo* are the spirits of the dead persons of a town. These spirits are classified into good and evil ones.

#### The good spirits

The good spirits are placed in a hierarchy as follows: the spirits of all Eze Nri, which are regarded as the collective royal ancestors called *Nri Menri*; the spirits of the dead *ozo*-titled men, who are regarded as founders of the various hierarchies of the extant lineages, called *Ichie Ukwu*, what is, the great ancestors; the spirits of all dead untitled fathers with extant lineages, called *Ichie Nta*, that is the small ancestors; the spirits of some dead married daughters called *Umu Ada*.

Nri priests argue that good, *mma*, and evil, *njo*, are generated by *Alusi* who direct them towards men. Evil men are visited by the evils generated by the *Alusi* and good men are visited by the good generated by the *Alusi*. Good and evil visit a compound because the compound is made up of good and bad persons. Since an adult individual is a mixture of good and evil, the life of a person fluctuates between success and failure, happiness and sorrow, richness and poverty, health and sickness, impotence and fecundity, and so on. It is the duty of the head of a lineage to see that the members of his compound and lineage live a 'clean' life as defined by Nri culture and traditions. He does this by seeing that all the rules of taboos are kept and that all abominations are cleansed, that relationships between men, and between men and the various supernatural forces and beings, are kept. In doing this, he has to solicit the aid of his immediate ancestors and the ancestors of his *minimal*, *major* and *maximal* lineages, for the ancestors control the volume of good and evil





Plate 7. Ancestor cult. Anumba, Isi Nze of Nri and Umu Ochogu, pouring libations on *ofo* and *okponsi* in the altar of a temple.

that flows into the compound of their descendants. The head of the lineage must therefore be in constant communication with the ancestors. He must give them food, *nye nni*, always, and he must offer blood and non-blood sacrifices, *ilo mmuo*, to them because by doing so they are encouraged to perform their protective function in the invisible world. Hence the ancestor cult is central to Nri religion, and the structure of political leadership reflects the structure of lineages in terms of who has access to the control of the ancestor cult. (Plate 7).

Every structurally important ancestor has an altar called *iru mmuo* situated in a temple called *obu*. On the altar are wooden or metal dumb-bell shaped objects called *okponsi*, which are symbolic vehicles for conveying offerings to the various ancestors. The double-headed dumb-bells belong to great ancestors, the single headed to small ancestors and the cylindrically shaped ones to married dead daughters. Besides these objects

are the *ofo* and *alo* of the ancestors and those of the custodian of the temple. The *alo* is the staff symbolizing the power that the lineage received from *Chukwu* during the time of its creation; the *ofo* is the staff of authority that the lineage head received from the ancestors to control and direct the activities of its members. It is with *ofo* that he approaches and communicates with the ancestor and the *alo* gives him the power to do so. The holder of the lineage *alo* and *ofo* in Nri is regarded as the centre of both ritual and political power and authority. Because every family has its *alo* and *ofo* and because every lineage also has its own, the centres of power and authority are many. But because the lineages are ranked hierarchically, these centres of power and authority are also hierarchically ranked in such a way that the maximal lineages have greater power and authority than the major, and the major more than the minor, and the minor more than the minimal.<sup>6</sup>

Above all, these loci of power and authority of

lineages are those of the state and are symbolically located in the temple of *Nri Menri* in the palace of *Eze Nri*. *Nri Menri* are the collective ancestors of all *Eze Nri* and therefore of all *Nri*. In Chapter 2, while discussing the political history of *Nri* during the reign of *Nri Ifikuanim*, I described how the temple and shrine of *Nri Menri* was first established and how the location of this temple rotates with the kingship. I pointed out that *Nri Ifikuanim* is believed to have acquired his power and authority

man without *ozo* title in the politics and rituals of the lineage. This is one reason why every *Nri* man wants to take the *ozo* title.

The priests and members of all the cults associated with *Chukwu* and with all the *Alusi* have their *ofo*, which give them the authority to officiate as priests and leaders of these cults. The *eze ana* that is the priest of the *Alusi*, of the earth-cult, has his special *ofo*. The priest also keeps the *alo* of the *Alusi*. When he dies they are passed

Table 2. The Relationship between Power and Authority and the Type of *ofo* and *alo* held.

Segments	Type of <i>Ofo</i> and <i>Alo</i>	Rating
Eze Nri	<i>Ofo-Nri, Alo-Nri</i>	Highest
<i>Ozo</i> -titled men	<i>Ofo-Ozo, Alo-Ozo</i>	Higher
<i>Alusi</i> priests	<i>Ofo-Alusi, Alo-Alusi</i>	High (according to <i>Alusi</i> )
Elders without <i>Ozo</i>	<i>Ofo-Okpala, Nil</i>	High (according to lineage)
Young men without <i>Ozo</i>	Nil, Nil	
Women and children	Nil, Nil	

to rule from *Eri*, his father, who derived it from *Chukwu*, the great creator of all things. *Nri Ifikuanim* inherited the *alo-Nri Menri* and the *ofo-Nri Menri* from *Eri*. The *alo-Nri Menri* is a two-headed spear that symbolizes power derived from *Chukwu* and handed down from generation to generation, starting from *Eri* through an unbroken line of fourteen *Eze Nri* to the present fifteenth *Eze Nri*. The *ofo-Nri Menri* is the staff of authority that *Eri* also handed down to *Nri Ifikuanim* and to the present *Eze Nri*. These two staffs are part of the *Eze Nri*'s regalia. They are kept in the inner chamber of the palace and no one ever handles them except himself and his *Umu Diana* chamber officials. They are taboo objects.

Similarly, all titled *ozo* men have their own *alo* and *ofo* which give them power and authority to be leaders and priests in their lineages. These *ofo* and *alo* are derived from *Eze Nri* and are therefore limited in effectiveness. Elders without title also have *ofo* and *alo* of their parents and their own personal *ofo*, which gives them authority to be leaders and priests in their lineage. But since these elders have no personal *alo*, because they have not taken the *ozo* title and since their personal *ofo* is less effective than that of *ofo-ozo*, their power and authority are limited. Hence a younger *ozo* man takes precedence over an elderly

down to the person to succeed him. Since the *Alusi* are collectively owned by maximal lineages and since the activities of the *Alusi* go beyond the maximal lineage boundaries and can affect anyone in *Nri*, the ritual power and authority of the priests of the various *Alusi* are extensive.

The *Nri* male population can be visualized as being made up of persons each struggling to control the different types of *alo* and *ofo* that mean different levels of power and authority. A man who holds the *ofo* and *alo* as the eldest of his lineage, and also that of the *ozo* title, and also that of the various *Alusi*, is indeed a man of tremendous political and ritual power and authority. Anumba and Odenigbo are two typical examples of such men, (in *Nri* in 1968), who are not only intelligent but are also holders of the *ofo-ozo* and *alo-ozo*, and *ofo* and *alo* of the *Alusi* of their respective lineages.

Since *Eze Nri* is ritually considered as both *Mmuo* and *Alusi*, he holds the supreme *alo* and *ofo* in *Nri*. The *Nri* population can be categorized into five main segments in terms of the amount of power and authority they command or are likely to command, based on the type of *ofo* and *alo* they hold or are likely to hold. Table 2 illustrates this.

Amongst those *Igbo* peoples who were under the direct influence of *Nri* hegemony, the belief was held (and it is still held by many) that the *ofo*



and *alo* of Nri, held by Eze Nri, were the supreme ones. The 'power' of all *ofo* and *alo* in northern Igbo land is believed to have been derived from those of Nri. Igbo men still come to Nri to obtain their *ofo* and *alo*. A Nri proverb, which was properly quoted by M.D.W. Jeffreys but wrongly rendered, says '*Ofo anyi ji eli Igbo*'. Jeffreys' translation ran: '*Ofo* (sacred emblem) with which we eat the Igbo.'<sup>7</sup> *Eli* in the Igbo language means 'to eat'. *Eli ulu* means literally 'to eat profit', but idiomatically means 'to make profit'. A more correct translation of the proverb is '*Ofo* with which we made profit from the Igbo.' In Igbo marketing, ideas about profit-making involve the ability to persuade and temporarily dominate the individual in the haggling process that follows. The idiomatic meaning of the proverb, rendered by my informants as '*Ofo* used to rule, *chi*, the *Igbo*', may be considered more appropriate, viewed against the background of other evidence of Nri activities in Igbo land.<sup>8</sup>

The *ozo* title and the various supernatural beings and forces are common features of most Igbo towns. The religious and political systems of these communities were based on the control of *ofo* and *alo*. Since the supreme *alo* and *ofo* were believed to be controlled by Eze Nri, it is not difficult to comprehend how Eze Nri was able to exert some measure of control over these Igbo towns. The high position of esteem and respectability that Nri men had in Igbo land was first indirectly reported by Olaudah Equiano in 1789, when he referred to the function of *Mgburichi* men in his Igbo town, and by Captain John Adam in 1823 when he again referred to a class of Igbo slaves called *Mgburichi*.<sup>9</sup> In 1906 Major Leonard clarified the issue of Nri dominance in Igbo towns when he wrote: 'Thus when a chief is about to assume the kingship of a community he is obliged to have a representative from Nri, who becomes the master of all the necessary ceremonies, for without his presence the whole function becomes irregular, if not invalid...it is essential that the budding monarch should receive from the Nri priest certain requisite ornaments without which the former is unable even to offer kola-nuts to the tribal gods...'<sup>10</sup> The ornaments to which Leonard referred were *ofo* and *alo* and the chief and monarch were the *ozo* and *obi* or *eze* titles respectively.

The concept of a good man in Nri is based on

the character and success of an individual. A good man is a man who is upright in his dealings with men – he does not pervert the truth, justice or the peace of Nri. He breaks no taboos and does nothing of which the ancestors will disapprove. He has wealth and children and good health, which are the markers of his success, and above all, he takes the *ozo* title. If such a man dies he becomes *ichie ukwu*, a great ancestor. If he has all things but dies without the *ozo* title he becomes *ichie Nta*, a small ancestor. If a man dies poor, wretched and childless, or prematurely, he cannot be an ancestor and he cannot reincarnate in his grandchildren. Only persons with a successful life can reincarnate in their grandchildren or in the unborn of their lineage.

In traditional Nri, the reward for a good life is becoming an ancestor and freeing oneself from the molestation of the *alusi* during one's lifetime. All these can be achieved if one is obedient to the invisible higher powers. These invisible higher powers are *Chukwu*, *Alusi* and *Mmuo* and all are symbolized in the visible higher power represented by Eze Nri. Obedience to Eze Nri is therefore obedience to the higher powers. No Nri man dares disobey the Eze Nri, for the consequences are clear. This is both the norm and the ideal. In Nri, achievement is epitomized in the control of various *ofo* and *alo*. Such control involves title-taking, and this involves observing certain institutionalized political and religious behaviours and the distribution of acquired wealth to former members of the title association.

#### The bad spirits

There are three main types of bad spirits according to Nri religious beliefs. The *akologoli* spirit is the spirit of dead persons who lived a worthless life on earth. Such persons grow old without achieving anything and die without marrying or having a child. Such persons cannot reincarnate in the children of their lineages, their spirits remain in the spirit world roaming wild and from time to time they gain entry into the world of men to cause confusion.

Other spirits called *ekwensu* are those of persons who died accidental deaths, committed suicide or died prematurely. All bad deaths are called *onwu ofo*. Persons who die bad deaths cannot be reincarnated. Their spirits never reach the spirit land. They come back to earth to cause bad

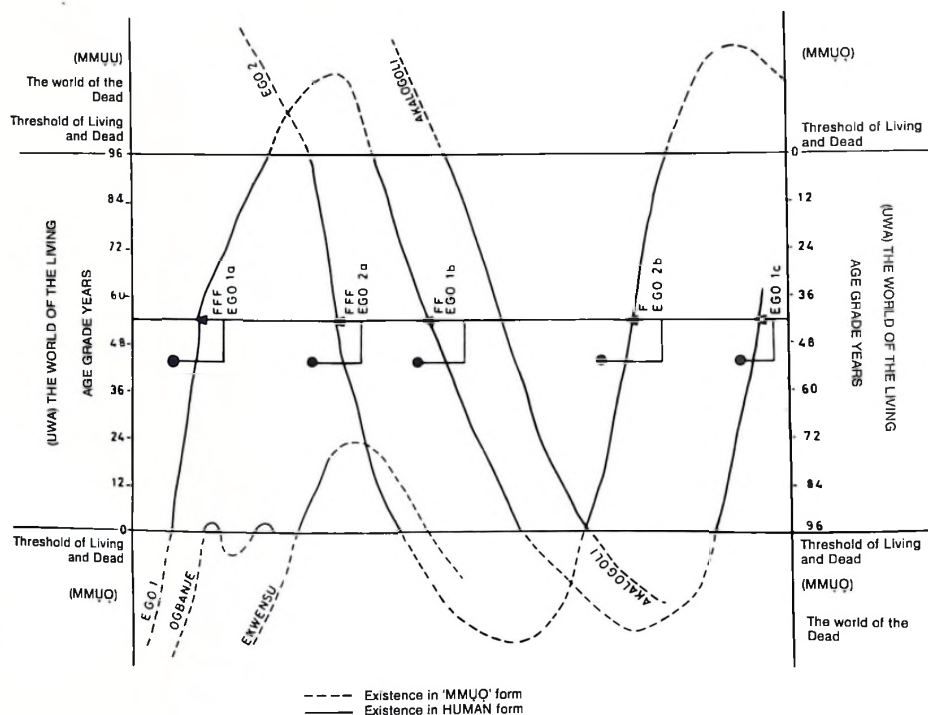
deaths. All accidents, drowning, suicide, death during childbirth, and murder are caused by these spirits.

The *ogbanje* spirits are the spirits of children who die shortly after their birth or during childhood. Their spirits never go to spirit-land. They remain in this world and revisit the womb of their mother to be born again and then die prematurely. If something ritually is not done to stop them from dying they will die and be born again.

Nri people have elaborate rituals that they believe, if properly done, will put these bad spirits

in bondage and frustrate their activities. Thus the *akalogoli* may be ritually tied, and *ekwensu* ritually shot dead and buried, and *ogbanja* ritually prevented from dying or from being conceived. The *dibia aja*, the traditional medicine man, specialized in warding off these bad spirits by a special type of sacrifice called *aja*, is consulted when these spirits become active. Nri men are specialists in this type of work and so their services are sought by the inhabitants of other Igbo settlements. This was one of the ritual services Nri men performed in the past in the Igbo

Figure 4



Ego 1 & Ego 2: Successful ancestors who lived a full life. They reincarnate in alternate generations.

Akalogoli: Lived a full span of life as a man but cannot reincarnate.

Ekwensu: Lived a short span, died accidentally and cannot reincarnate.

Ogbanja: Died as a child, born again and died. Has very short existence on earth.

villages and they still do this in some towns, but with reduced frequency and less ostentation.

The punishment for living a bad life is to be afflicted by misfortune directed by the *Alusi* and/or to be entangled in a misfortune laid by one of these bad spirits. While the ancestors protect men from the evils caused by the *Alusi*, the *dibia* can render harmless the evil forces associated with the bad spirits. No Nri wishes to die and become one of those bad spirits. The struggle of life based on living a successful good life is the only way to escape total annihilation of existence. To reincarnate means to exist again and again to eternity. Not to reincarnate is to be annihilated. Here again is one of the ideologies that motivates achievement in Nri. Figure 4 shows how this concept of reincarnation and existence is tied up with the genealogical structure.

#### Mmanwu

Nri 'mythology' is rich in narratives concerning the land of the spirit. Igbo people in the past strongly believed that the road to the spirit-land passed through Nri. This may be a symbolic way of saying that Nri people can communicate with the spirit world.

Nri people believe that the spirits of the dead can re-appear in the form of *mmanwu* to entertain, bless, reprimand or curse individuals or groups of the whole society. In Chapter 7 I have dealt with the types of *mmanwu* (Plates 8 and 9). Here, I simply wish to say that in the past Nri controlled

the codes and rules of *mmanwu* clubs in most Igbo settlements under Nri hegemony. Before a settlement launched a new *mmanwu*, a Nri man was commissioned to supervise it, since it was regarded as a ritually risky operation which could only be safely done by a Nri man. The Nri man gave the group the *ofo* which enabled them to handle the new *mmanwu*.

#### Uwa

The visible world is called *uwa*. It is occupied by men, animals, plants, water and other inanimate things and constantly visited by invisible beings and forces. Men live in towns, *obodo*. Nri is a town believed to be occupied by a mystical group of people ruled by a mystically powerful king. This is how Nri people see their world and this is how some Igbo people see Nri today, and that was how many more Igbo people saw Nri thirty years ago and still more so before the arrival of the missionary in 1905.

In Nri the institutionalized ritual relationship between person and person, and between persons of different categories, is framed in terms of what they call *nso* and *alu*. *Nso* means that which is to be avoided or that which if done, said or seen defiles the doer, who is said to have committed *alu*. *Nso* and *alu* may be called taboo and abomination respectively. The defiled person or thing is in a position to defile other persons or things. Anything defiled is vulnerable to the actions of the *Alusi* because the person or thing ceases to



Plate 8  
*Mmanwu Agwu*



Plate 9 *Ijele Mmanwu*

enjoy the protection of the ancestors. The defilement can be removed and the former state re-established if the defiled person confesses and an act of ritual purification called *ikpu alu*, meaning to 'drag' away abomination, is performed by officially recognized persons.

Abomination is of two types, major and minor. The cleansing or removing of a major abomination involves the use of a live he-goat and 16 yams, while the removal of a minor abomination involves the use of a few fowl for sacrifices, as well as payment for services. Some major abominations require the use of a cow. The economic aspect of the taboo is indeed obvious since it generates a flow of resources by the transfer of wealth.

In Nri taboos are broken all the time, just as traffic laws are constantly broken in Lagos or London. Once broken they are dealt with immediately. One may 'get away with it' but future misfortune may occur to unearth the untreated case. It is pointless hiding a broken taboo, for it is believed that a person who breaks a major taboo has committed a major abomination. The person is in a state of ritual danger because he is defiled and polluted. He can spread his pollution to people, animals and things. Even

today his immediate relations will become worried. People will begin to avoid visiting him and eating with him. He becomes socially ostracized within his community. He is regarded 'as a leper' or 'as one suffering from smallpox'. Above all, the person becomes susceptible to the evils of the *Alusi* because his ancestor will also abandon him.

Similarly, the whole of a community can be under *alu*. Thus, in the past, Eze Nri could pronounce *alu* on the community. The whole community would be in a state of pollution and could pollute any person who came into it. Similarly, markets could become taboo and no one would attend them. Chapter 9 considers the political significance of community and market taboos.

Breaking a minor taboo has a different implication. The person is a danger to only himself and his lineage, for the spreading of the pollution is limited. Similarly, to break a personal or individual taboo the person alone who owns the taboo is in danger, for it does not spread. If a taboo is broken and the ritual of cleansing is done the person is considered cleansed and normal and so are the things around him.

Earlier on I pointed out that taboos are constantly broken and more often repaired than

hidden. Indeed, in 1971-1972 it was observed that up to twenty cases of broken taboos were reported within a week, of these only six were considered major and serious. If this is so now, when a good number of all the taboos were abrogated between 1910 and 1970 – and when a good number of Christians only care to observe some of the major taboos and those that appear the same as Christian sins – one could argue that the frequency of breaking taboo was greater in the past. But Nri elders always argue to the contrary; after all, the past is always a golden age.

About 80% of people's behaviour and misbehaviour in Nri was and is still coded and controlled in terms of *nso* and *alu*. This is also applicable to most Igbo towns now, and even more so in the past. Since *nso* and *alu* and *ikpu alu* are critical in the field of social control in Nri, I shall devote some time to elaborating the social and political implication of these joint phenomena.

*Taboo (Nso), abomination (Alu), and purification (Ikpu Alu) in Nri.*

There are three categories of taboos observed by an individual in the moral community of Nri. These communal taboos distinguish the Nri moral community from other communities around. Table 4 gives a list of those communal taboos observed by every Nri regardless of age, sex or status.

The second types are those observed by and for Eze Nri. These specific taboos, when broken, do not defile the person of Eze Nri but rather the palace and the whole state. The duty of the palace priest is to be on constant guard, cleansing them in the accepted ways. Table 5 gives a list of these taboos.

The third type of specific taboos are those observed by *ozo*-titled men. The breaking of these taboos places the *ozo* man and his temple in a state of defilement. Since he is defiled he must not attend the palace of Eze Nri until he is purified. Table 6 gives a list of these taboos.

The fourth type of specific taboos are those observed by all adult men who have performed the ceremony of 'coming of age', called *iwu ogodo*, in which the male covers his nakedness with a piece of loin cloth for the first time, around the age of puberty. At that age he is considered ritually accountable for his actions. Table 7 lists the taboos.

The fifth type are those observed by all married

women and girls who have started menstruating. Table 8 lists these taboos.

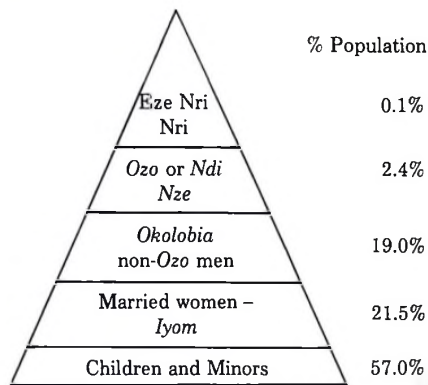
Bearing these categories in mind, it is easy to see that Nri society is institutionally differentiated into two major groups: those who observe taboos and are ritually accountable for their actions and those who do not observe taboos and are not ritually accountable for their actions. The latter are generally children and ritual minors and are called *umu aka*. The former are divided into four groups. Each group is differentiated from the other by the types of taboos its members observe and by the types of ritual accountability that are involved. In this analysis the Eze Nri is regarded as a moral group even though he is one – he is the mighty one.

For a girl to begin to observe certain types of specific taboos she must have had her first menstruation and married immediately. Similarly, for a boy to begin to observe specific adult taboos he must have taken certain titles and carried out the ceremony of *iwu ogodo*. For an adult male, *okolobia*, to observe the next higher specific taboos he must have taken the *ozo* title and, finally, for an *ozo* man to observe the next higher specific taboos he must have taken the Nri title. Menstruation and marriage for women are achieved statuses which involve elaborate rituals and ceremonies. Similarly, the minor titles and the *iwu ogodo* ceremony, and the *Ozo* and Nri titles are all achieved statuses that involve the transfer of wealth and the distribution of wealth accumulated during a long period of time.

If by social stratification one accepts the definition put forward by M.G. Smith: 'Institutionalized differentiations of access to positions of differing advantage...',<sup>11</sup> Nri society could be described as stratified along ritual lines in terms of taboo. The ritual strata are as follows: at the top is the Eze Nri, followed by the *ozo*-titled men, the non-*ozo* men, then the married women, *Iyom*, and at the bottom are the children, regarded as ritual minors, *umu azi*. Each stratum, with the exception of the ritual minors, has its distinctive taboos to observe. This system has a pyramidal and hierarchical structure that reflects the ritual, economic and political equalities and inequalities inherent in Nri society. The structure in 1968-1972 can be diagrammatically represented, showing the percentage of the population in each stratum, as follows:



Fig. 5 *Pyramidal Structure of Social Stratification in Nri*



*How actions and sanctions are evaluated in Nri*

I have been analysing one of the most important systems of social control in Nri. It is important at this stage to analyse how Nri people evaluate an action and work out its sanction.<sup>12</sup> From a close study of cases handled both at the Nri palace and at the lineage levels, and the arguments that occur both at the market squares and in various political groups, it is easy to abstract three major inter-dependent categories of ratings.<sup>13</sup> An action is rated either good, neutral or evil. Good and evil actions are those that directly affect one's fellow human beings and they may or may not have ritual consequences, and may be major or minor. Hence reward and punishment are expressed as major and minor. A neutral action is one that directly affects supernatural beings, animals and things.

A good action may be ritually good or practically good or good for its own sake. To help a friend is practically good because one has increased one's social horizon; people will praise one for that. To help a stranger is just good for its own sake and people may or may not praise you, depending on the amount of help given and the circumstances surrounding the action. To offer sacrifices regularly to the *Alusi* and *ndi ichie* and act responsibly are good acts which not only give ritual protection against evil and misfortune but also increase the prospect of progress here on earth.

To beat up an *ozo* man is an evil action that is a major abomination. It is laying a hand on a pros-

pective ancestor. It has to be dealt with by major ritual purification. To beat up one's non-titled elder is a serious action and a minor abomination. It is treated by minor ritual purification. To beat up an age-mate is not an abomination; it is practically evil and one may be fined, heavily or lightly depending on circumstances that led to the action. But to kill a python snake is a neutral action that is ritually a major and very serious abomination, because the python snake is considered the 'child of *Alusi*'. This can be settled by a major ritual purification (Plate 10). To eat a snail is a neutral action which is a minor abomination for a titled adult and no abomination for a minor. A minor purification is necessary to clear the abomination. Similarly, if

Plate 10 A woman removing a python from a compound to prevent it being killed accidentally.



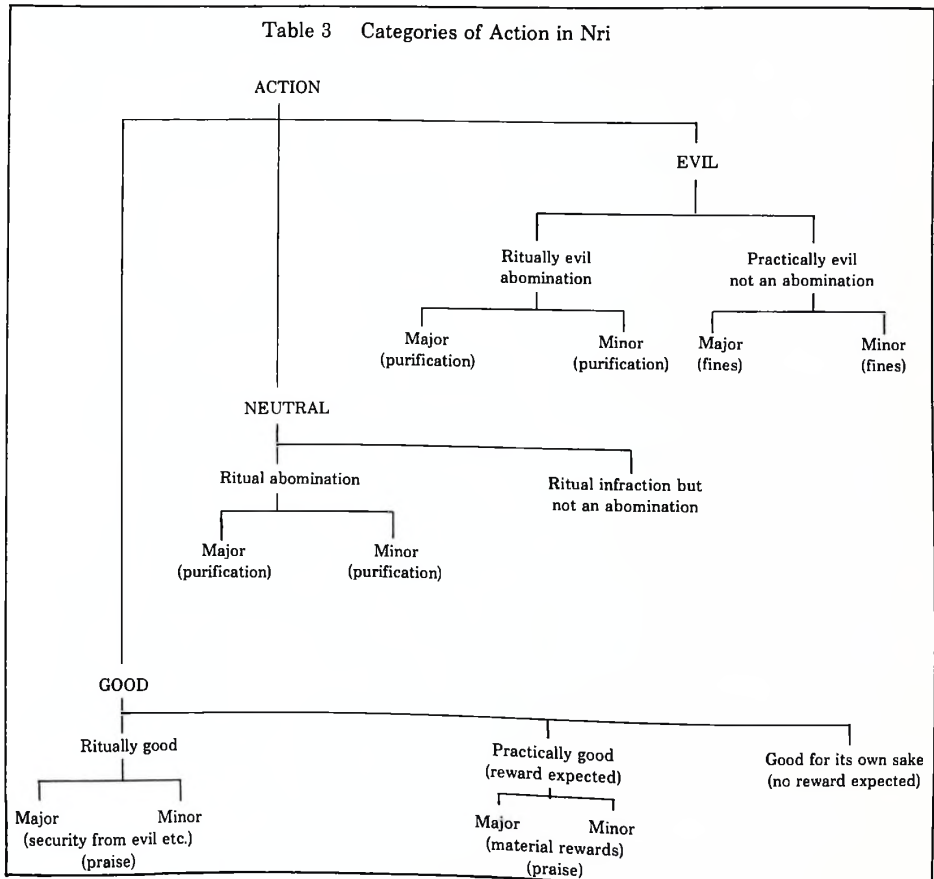
one breaks one's personal taboo, that is the taboo prescribed for one to observe for one's personal ritual welfare by the traditional medicine man, it is simply a ritual infraction that is not an abomination. Of course one can be ritually reinstated to one's former state by the performance of a special minor cleansing called *ofu ese*. Table 3 attempts to summarize diagrammatically the categories discussed above.

The supreme position of Eze Nri in this system is very clear. He alone can order the abrogation of any taboo or pronounce the enactment of new ones. The Eze Nri is regarded as *mmuo* and as a kind of *Alusi*. He lives apart and is hemmed

around with taboos. He rules his people through his *Nzemabua* council who are also hemmed around by taboos. The adult males and women and children follow. All cases of major abominations are brought to the court of the *Nzemabua* council, which discusses the nature and character of the taboos. The minor taboos are dealt with in the various lineages affected.

Purifications are performed by specially authorized persons. In the past Eze Nri controlled all the taboos in most of Igbo land and only Nri men had the power to enforce or remove them. This was one of the functions of Nri people in Igbo land that Major Leonard and others reported on

Table 3 Categories of Action in Nri



at the close of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. To this day, to a certain extent, Nri people still perform this function in various Igbo towns that still accept their system. In Chapter 9 I show how this system developed into an elaborate control system that led to the development of a hegemony based on rituals.

It is therefore clear that in Nri the greater the economic wealth one accumulates and the greater the amount of wealth channelled into title-taking, the greater the number of higher statuses one acquires. Also, the greater the number of higher social statuses one acquires, the greater the number of taboos one observes as a member of a group. And the greater the number of taboos, the greater is one's influence and responsibilities in the moral, ritual, political and economic life of Nri. This, in my opinion, is the basis of the Nri system. It is a system based on individual achievement.

*Taboos as a system of ordering, controlling and communicating with symbolic codes*

Taboos are central in the political organization of Nri, especially in the field of social concern. It is therefore essential to analyse the structure of taboos contextually. F. Steiner defined taboo as 'an element of all those situations in which attitudes to values are expressed in terms of danger behaviour'. Steiner's analysis was based on the premise that social relations are expressed in terms of danger behaviour. He did not go further than this.<sup>14</sup>

Mary Douglas, in her analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo, maintained that pollution and taboo are rules of patterning and ordering realities and coping with anomalies. She argues that a system that ignores anomalies runs the risk of 'forfeiting confidence'. She defined anomaly as 'an element which does not fit a given set of series'.<sup>15</sup> Her main data were derived from Leviticus and Deuteronomy, buttressed by fragmentary ethnographic data from about thirty 'primitive' cultures of Africa, Asia, India and Australia, lifted out of context. Because the Bible data are not ethnographic material as we know it, and because the other data are fragmentary and out of context, it is not surprising that my analysis of taboo may to some extent be different from that of Steiner and Douglas.

It is easy to demonstrate that taboo is a system

of patterning and ordering of reality. I have shown how Nri society is stratified into five groups differentiated by the types of specific taboo each observe. This is not a new idea. It is implied in Steiner's analysis and definitely clarified in Douglas's work.<sup>16</sup> But it is not easy to sustain, as a cross-cultural application, that taboo is a system of dealing with anomalies. The fact is that if one picks out each case of taboo and examines each in relation to the others, the theory of anomaly tends to make sense only in some cases and not in all. For example, it is difficult to see the anomaly resolved in the Nri case where it is taboo to eat the crocodiles of the Nri lakes, but it is not taboo to eat the same type of crocodiles of other lakes, and still more difficult to see what is anomalous in yams that makes them objects of taboo in one context and not taboo in another.

I shall therefore examine the structure of Nri taboo as a system that operates within the total cultural system of Nri. The basic assumption in Nri society is that man is a man of action. By action I mean activity. Men living together in a town are each engaged in various activities, which are basically materialistic. To achieve maximum activity, men compete and co-operate, and to do these they interact and communicate. Therefore there are bound to be clashes which will slow down or speed up the activities in this type of society.

One way of achieving order is by the classification of people in Nri society into a hierarchy. Thus, in Nri, groups are differentiated by the type of taboos they observe. In this respect taboos may be considered a system of specialized symbolic codes for ordering persons into institutionalized groups. Once order has been structured by the use of these specialized symbolic codes called taboos, the groups that emerge interact and communicate by the application of the three-tier symbolic codes: tabooed actions – abomination – purification. I see taboo as a system of communication and control based on symbolic codes. To me this is the second important aspect of taboo as a system in the social structure of Nri and that is why it is relevant in all sphere of activity in Nri ritual, politics and economics.

In my analysis, by symbols I mean the use of concrete and/or abstract imagery to express concrete or abstract ideas and emotions, or to express a wider and a general ideal world of which

the one we live in is an imperfect representation of it. I view Nri society as a system of controlled actions in which people are stratified in terms of the taboos they observe into five major groups. Since it is a system of controlled action it is also a system of controlled communication. Control and communication can be both physical and symbolic. In the Nri system it is symbolic and less physical.

The Nri case shows that taboo as a dynamic symbolic system has three ingredients: the tabooed actions, abomination and purification. These three codes are like the traffic light that says: 'Halt to actions!'. Hence, during the activity of persons, when an act of taboo is broken a danger alarm of 'halt' is raised. Then it is decided whether it is a major or minor abomination that is generated by the infraction. Abomination is like the amber light that indicates a long halt by shining steadily, or a short halt by flickering. Once the magnitude of the abomination is determined, the corresponding purification follows and all activity resumes. Thus purification is like the green light that permits the beginning of a new action.

As this system of controlled communication cannot use visual red, amber and green lights, it uses cultural symbolic codes. Hence taboo symbolic codes are derived from six sources:

- a The symbols related to humans – such as twins.
- b The symbols related to animals – such as pythons.
- c The symbols related to things – such as do not touch this object.
- d The symbols related to speech – such as do not talk or say.
- e The symbols related to periods – such as do not come out in the night.
- f The symbols related to action – such as sacrifice for purification.

If anomalies are inherent in some of these symbols they simply help to intensify the symbolic codes. Indeed there are other ways of intensifying the codes such as references to contradictions and analogies, which are also inherent in some of the symbolic codes used. So anomalies are only one type of intensifier used in taboo codes and cannot explain the whole complex phenomenon of taboo.

The Eze Nri manipulates this system of human

control and communication which operates by the use of these symbolic codes. He could alter the codes of the taboo or remove them. To do this he needs the help of all *ozo*-titled men in Nri called *Ndi Nze*. This structure of control and communication may be illustrated thus:

Fig. 6 The Main Structure of Symbolic Control and Communication in Nri



It has to be emphasized that the concept of law also exists in Nri society. The word for law is *iwu*. It means that which is enacted in other than terms of taboo. The *Eze Nri* and his councils make laws to be obeyed by the whole of Nri. An infraction of these laws does not constitute breaking a taboo. Those who break the law are punished or fined. Similarly, lineage leaders and heads of various organisations and groups make law and those who break it are dealt with by fines or social ostracism.

When the mechanism of law and taboo is carefully studied, one can see that both belong to the same order of social control operating at different levels. Structurally, law and taboo are both systems of control and communication using different coding systems. Law uses the code system of force and rationalisation, while taboo uses the code system of symbols.

Nri is a society that depended more on the use of taboo symbolic codes. Even today in Nri the two systems are still alive and interwoven. Thus in 1968 a woman killed a child: the police took the woman away because it is a criminal offence. The matter did not end there. It is also taboo to kill. The woman had committed a major *alu* and a long purification ceremony was carried out. In the past the purification ceremony would also be done and the woman would pay to the lineage that lost the child a sum of money equivalent to a bride-gift or bride-wealth.

Ike Mmadu.

The concept of individual achievement based on individual power, inherent in every man, is prominent and critical in Nri. It is epitomized in Nri personality cults. The five cults are:



*The Ikenga cult*

This is the cult of the right hand, symbolically represented by the image of a man with a ram's head. It represents the hand with which a man obtains his living.

*The iru cult*

This is the cult of the face, symbolized by a wooden chalice. It is the face that charms whoever gazes on it.

*The uhu cult*

This is the cult of the tongue, symbolized by a wooden, tongue-like object. It symbolizes the powerful tongue that can persuade and reduce into submission the hearts of people.

*The Uku na ije cult*

This is the cult of the feet, symbolized by a carved wooden figure of a foot. It represents the feet of successful adventures into foreign lands.

*The umu oku cult*

This is the cult that conserves accumulated wealth. It is symbolised by a wooden saucer with a flat handle.

Every adult Nri in the past had these five cult objects placed on the altar of his ancestors and sacrifices were offered to them as occasion demanded. The balance between communal pursuit and individual pursuit is reflected in the balance between the communal cults discussed previously and the individual personality cults that I am discussing here. The Nri believe that health is essential for communal and individual existence. Only the communal cults can give health. Health and long life are beyond the control of the individual; they come from the invisible. But success here in the world lies in the hands of the individual. Nri people do not believe that they can be witches and sorcerers; only strangers living in Nri can be witches and sorcerers. But they do believe that every man has certain powers and capabilities latent within him. His task is to arouse these latent powers and capabilities by both ritual and physical means. Thus if one has health, works hard with one's hands, travels far and wide, has eloquence to persuade people, has a strong personality and is able to accumulate and conserve his wealth, one's successes are assured. The wealth accumulated and conserved should be transformed into higher social status by title-

taking. Thus Nri culture rests on a delicately sustained division between progressive individualism and communal conservatism.

The energy and drive behind the entrepreneurial and political activities of Nri people in a large portion of Igbo land, in the past, seem to have had full expression in their religious concepts and cosmology. The character of this entrepreneurial activity in its economic aspect in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries is the main topic of the next chapter.

Plate 11 *The Ikenga personality cult, cult of the right hand.*



Plate 12 Umu oku,  
preserver of wealth.



Plate 13. Personality cult objects, (left to right): iru, cult of the face; uho, cult of the tongue; ukuna ije, cult of the feet



Table 4 Communal Taboos (Nso)

Some of the Nso were abrogated between 1911 and 1972. Those abrogated are shown. Major and minor Nso are also shown.

Description of Taboo	Type		Abrogated	
	Major	Minor	Yes	No
It is taboo to:				
1. Eat or kill civet cat ( <i>edi</i> ) and giant rat ( <i>eyi</i> ).	x	or x		x
2. Eat crocodile living in <i>Nri</i> lake (others could be eaten).	x			x
3. Kill or eat python snakes (see note below).	x			x
4. Kill or eat <i>Alusi</i> animals (cows, goats, fowls).	x			x
5. Have sexual intercourse with certain categories of kin, or animals.	x	or x		x
6. Reveal the secret of the ritual mask.	x	or x		x
7. Kill a human being.	x			x
8. Torture a human being – tying with a cord.		x		x
9. Commit suicide	x			
10. Die accidentally	x			x
11. Abort an unborn baby.	x			x
12. Die of swollen feet, hands, stomach.	x		x	
13. Confess crime during illness. (All crimes to be confessed before illness.)	x			x
14. Leave a compound through a hole, <i>Npio</i> , made for animals.		x	x	
15. Bury women, children and untitled men in a wooden coffin.		x	x	
16. Steal yam.	x			x
17. Uproot yam or cut it off during growth.	x			x
18. Engage in highway robbery.	x			x

Note: (a) It is taboo to eat the following animals: snakes, some tortoise, python snakes, alligators, lizards, dogs, vultures, some monkeys, some crocodiles, cats; (b) 'x' or 'x' means the taboo can be minor or major, depending on the status of the person who breaks it.

Table 5 Specific Taboos Observed By and For Eze Nri

Description of Taboo	Type		Abrogated	
	Major	Minor	Yes	No
<b>A Those related to the supernaturals</b>				
1. Eze must not see a corpse.	x			x
2. Eze must not see an <i>Alusi</i> .	x			x
3. Eze must not see a ritual masquerader.	x			x
4. Eze must not offer sacrifice.	x			x
5. Eze must not eat or touch ritual food.	x			x
<b>B Those related to human beings</b>				
1. Eze must not have a father.	x			x
2. Eze must not see his mother.	x			x
3. Eze must not mourn any death or accept sympathy.	x			x
4. Eze must not be touched by or touch any person – except the Adama.	x			x
<b>C Those related to things associated with Eze:</b>				
1. Eze's <i>ofo</i> and <i>alo</i> must not be touched except by Adama.	x			x
2. Eze's <i>uno ngu</i> , special inner temple that contains the <i>ofo</i> and <i>alo</i> , must not be entered by anyone – except Adama.	x			x
3. Eze's temple must not be entered by unclean persons.			x	

Table 5 (cont'd)

Description of Taboo	Type		Abrogated	
	Major	Minor	Yes	No
4. Eze's cloth must not be touched except by Adama.	x			x
5. Eze's hair must not be touched.	x			x
6. Eze's used bath water must not be touched.	x			x
<b>D Those observed by Eze's wife:</b>				
1. Eze's wife must wash in secret	x			x
2. Eze's wife's legs must not be stepped over.	x			x
3. Eze's wife must not have sex with any person.	x			x
4. Eze's wife must not be sprinkled with water.	x		x	
5. Certain words must not be said to Eze's wife.	x		x	
6. Certain looks must not be directed to Eze's wife.	x		x	
<b>E Those directly involving Eze himself:</b>				
1. Eze must not touch the water of the lakes with his feet.	x		x	
2. Only virgins (boys and girls) may get lake water for Eze.	x		x	
3. Eze must complete the rituals before shaving his hair.	x			x
4. Eze must put on his crown or cap with his own hands.	x		x	
5. Eze must wash his face, hands and feet early in the morning.	x			x
6. Eze must not sit on the ground.	x			x
7. Eze must not enter peoples' compounds through the gate, but must climb over the walls.	x		x	
8. Eze must not enter any woman's house.	x		x	
9. Eze must not cohabit with wives married before his coronation.	x		x	
<b>F Those related to animals:</b>				
1. Dogs must not enter Eze's palace.	x		x	
2. The teeth and skin of lions and leopards belong to Eze whenever killed in Nri or areas under Eze.	x		x	
3. The tusks of elephants belong to Eze whenever killed by a Nri.	x		x	
<b>G Those related to labour:</b>				
1. Eze must not climb trees.	x		x	
2. Eze must not carry anything on his head.	x		x	
3. Eze must not go to market.	x		x	
4. Eze must not use a hoe.	x		x	
5. Eze must plant only a row per day.	x		x	
<b>H Those related to edibles:</b>				
1. Corn must not be brought into the house where <i>ofo</i> and <i>alo</i> are.	x			x
2. Eze must not be seen eating.	x		x	
3. Eze must not eat in any person's house.	x			x
4. If one eats in Eze's house one must not lick one's fingers or wash one's hands.	x		x	
5. Eze must not break kola nut to be eaten by people.	x		x	
6. Eze must not eat or touch ritual food.	x			x
7. Eze must not eat cassava, cocoyam, banana, or a kind of yam called <i>ona</i> .	x			x
8. Adults must not cook for Eze.	x			x
9. No one may talk when Eze is eating.	x		x	
10. Eze must not eat snails, eggs, birds, certain kinds of fish, insects, snakes, some tortoise, some crocodile, cockerels, civit cat.	x			x
<b>I Those related to words, etc:</b>				
1. The curse of Eze Nri is <i>alu</i> on the thing or person to whom it is directed.	x			x

Note: One school of thought argues that all *Nso* observed by and for Eze Nri are regarded as major. Another school says that some are minor. Here I have followed the former school because my informants of the latter school were not able to state specifically which were major or minor. Also, all members of *Umu Diana* belong to the first school of thought.



Table 6 Specific Taboos Observed By or For *Ozo*-Titled Men

Description of Taboo	Type		Abrogated	
	Major	Minor	Yes	No
It is taboo to:				
1. Fight an <i>ozo</i> man	x			x
2. Push an <i>ozo</i> man down.		x		x
3. Carry a corpse.	x			x
4. Steal.	x			x
6. Lie.		x		x
7. Bury an <i>ozo</i> man without using a wooden coffin.	x			x
8. Be without a wife.		x		x
9. Come in close contact with menstruating women.		x	x	
10. Come in close contact with defiled persons.	x		x	

Table 7 Specific Taboos Observed by *Okolobia* Non-Titled Men

Description of Taboo	Type		Abrogated	
	Major	Minor	Yes	No
It is taboo to:				
1. Have a swollen scrotum *	x		x	
2. Die outside Nri *	x		x	
3. Die alone *	x		x	
4. Impregnate an unmarried girl or widow	x			x
5. Take the <i>ozo</i> title when father is living	x		x	
6. Have sex with another's wife		x		x
7. Eat food cooked by menstruating women (only elderly men).		x		x
8. Wash in a stream naked with another's wife present.		x	x	
* These taboos seem to be applicable to all adult males.				

Table 8 Specific Taboos Observed by Married Women

Description of Taboo	Type		Abrogated	
	Major	Minor	Yes	No
It is taboo to:				
1. Bear twins, triplets, etc.	x		x	
2. Wear pantalettes (all females)		x	x	
3. Feed a baby with two breasts simultaneously.		x	x	
4. Feed two babies of different sexes at a time.		x	x	
5. Climb a palm tree with rope, or house top.	x		x	
6. Conceive without first menstruation after a recent delivery.	x		x	
7. Kick yam.	x			x
8. Push down a standing wall.	x			x
9. Conceive when performing husband's mortuary rites.	x			x
10. Have sexual intercourse when performing husband's mortuary rites.	x			x
11. Open one's lower eyelids with fingers deriding one's husband.		x		x
12. Open one's vagina deriding one's husband.		x		x
13. Close or slam a door purposely against one's husband.		x		x
14. Refuse to perform husband's mortuary rites.	x			x
15. Bear a baby that comes out with the feet first.	x			x
16. Enter prohibited areas and places during period of menstruation.	x	x	x	
17. Cook for <i>ozo</i> men when menstruating.		x	x	
18. Go out at night during the month of ritual masquerading unaccompanied if not <i>nmemmanwu</i> .		x		x
19. See or look for the secret of the ritual mask.	x			x
20. Cohabit with another married man.		x		x

## CHAPTER THREE: NOTES

1. The concept of *Chukwu* is not a Christian derivative. It was reported by Major Leonard, who worked in that area around 1895, and by Northcote Thomas, around 1910. The Rev. Basden, 1910, and Father Duhaze, 1906–1910, reported that the concept of monotheism was present among the Igbo before the arrival of missionaries. Bishop Arinze confirms this in his book on *Igbo Sacrifice* (see References). M.D.W. Jeffreys discussed the four categories of spiritual beings among the Nri (Jeffreys, 1934, Chapter IV). Bearing in mind Jeffreys' limitations, (he made some major errors), his insight into Nri religion was basically sound, but he didn't comprehend the political significance of the religious system.

The information used here was observed in Nri and collected from the following persons: The Eze Nri; Uba, who was then the chief priest of Eze Nri's palace; Anidomaka, an experienced diviner; Nwokoye Odenigbo, the chief priest and head of *ozo* men in Uruoji, Anumba, the chief priest and head of *ozo* men of Nri; Okeke Okonkwo, Akunne and Atuanya. The last three were regarded as experts in Nri ritual. Akunne was regarded as expert in palace rituals and the cleansing of abominations. (see Appendix 4).

Differences of opinion do occur amongst them with regard to the interpretation of certain doctrines. In this analysis I am reporting the main trend of their beliefs, leaving the controversial issues for future work.

2. During my field work survey between October and December 1966 I visited fifty-six major Igbo towns located in various parts of the culture area. I have also visited other towns. One could see *alusi* shrines everywhere. (see Appendix 3 for towns visited between 1966–1972).

3. A.G. LEONARD, *op. cit.*

4. FR. DUHAZE, in Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*.

5. N.W. THOMAS, *op. cit.*

6. I use 'power' and 'authority' as defined by M.G. Smith:

'Power is the capacity to take autonomous actions...', and authority 'is the right to take certain kinds of action...' (Smith, 1968, pp. 143–201). But in the Nri case both power and authority are hierarchic in form. The structure of power and authority in Nri is the distribution of power and authority among the hierarchies of lineages and hierarchies of groups of persons stratified by taboo codes. The distribution is shown by the distribution of the two staffs, *alo* and *ofo*. Nri talk more of the *ofo* than the *alo*, because the concept of power is always taken for granted. It is the authority to use power that is disputed and contended, as is shown in Chapter 8.

7. M.D.W. JEFFREYS, *op. cit.*

8. This proverb is still used in Nri, especially during ritual offering that involves the use of *ofo*. I do not know if this proverb has another meaning. *Ochichi* in Igbo means rule. It is a term that covers a wide range of domination – from very strong to very weak.

9. O. EQUIANO, *op. cit.*

J. ADAM, *op. cit.*

10. A.G. LEONARD, *op. cit.*

11. M.G. SMITH, *Social Structure and Mobility in Economic Development*, p. 160.

12. A.R. RADCLIFFE-BROWN, *Social Sanctions and Primitive Law in Structure and Function*.

The method of dividing sanctions into primary and secondary and then into positive and negative cannot be usefully applied in the Nri case. I have used the Nri method of categorizing their deeds.

13. K.N. LEWELLYN and E.A. HOEBEL, *The Political Organization and Law-ways of the Comanche Indians*, 1940.

14. F. STEINER, *Tambo*, pp. 31–39, 141–147, 1956.

15. M. DOUGLAS, *Purity and Danger*, Chapters 1–3.

16. M. DOUGLAS, *Ibid.*

F. STEINER, *op. cit.*

## Chapter 4

# The Nri Economic System and its Political Relevance

### Introduction

A study of the Nri economic system and its relationship to the development of the state system and its hegemony is not a straightforward evaluation of the occupational differentiation of a pre-industrial economy based on subsistence. Careful study shows that it was: (a) a diversified economic system geared towards the maximization of profit, by both the government and individuals, based on the production of goods and especially services for both internal and external markets; (b) a system of production, distribution and consumption that was a part of a bigger system that flourished in the whole of the Igbo culture area; (c) a system closely related to the goals and values expressed in the tenets of the people's religious beliefs, and (d) a system in which religious beliefs were a function of a system of production, distribution and consumption.

It would therefore be a little myopic to analyse the Nri economic system in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries in isolation. Rather it should be examined against the general background of the whole economic activity of the Igbo culture area and of the surrounding culture areas, not only during the same period but also beyond this period.

I have adopted this approach because I see the development of some of the state systems in Western Africa as a process that continued beyond the coming of Europeans, to which some scholars limit themselves because of their resolute belief in documentary evidence and their lack of faith in oral tradition, no matter how scientifically collected and applied.<sup>1</sup> It is my experience that the kind of documentary evidence so often used, which is usually culled from travellers' records and the writings of European traders, missionaries and

administrators, can be as difficult to manipulate as the oral traditions. Both require careful handling and each has its own special technique of treatment; both are subject to many limitations.<sup>2</sup> The variety of the data I have collected is another reason why I have had to widen the horizon of my analysis. The data fall into four main types:

(i) Ethnographic data based on my observations and cross-checked oral traditions from persons who participated in the economic system of Nri and other towns as adults during the early part of this century.<sup>3</sup>

(ii) The ethnographic objects related to trade and economy that I collected from homes and temples in Nri and other places, and which are now preserved in the Odinani Museum in Nri. Some of these objects belonged to grandfathers, great-grandfathers and great-great-grandfathers, and some are claimed to be even older. There are striking similarities between these objects and those mentioned in some of the records of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries on the economy of Igbo land, on the one hand, and those excavated at Igbo-ukwu and Ezira dated to the ninth and fifteenth centuries A.D. respectively, on the other. Even if it is argued that the similarities may be due to different factors, then one has still to explain how very different factors produced such striking similarities between cultures separated in time but located in the same habitat. (Tables 9 and 10).

(iii) The records of some of the eye-witness accounts on the nature of the Igbo economy from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup>

(iv) The archaeological materials of Igbo-ukwu and Ezira (see table 9).

## The Pre- and Post-Eighteenth Century Economy of Nri

The earliest information about the economic life of Nri derives from the excavation at Igbo-ukwu, which is a town about twenty-five miles south-east of Onitsha. The objects are probably associated with Oreri, a Nri lineage founded during the reign of Nri Namoke. Four radio-carbon dates from four sites are in the ninth century A.D. and one in the fifteenth century A.D. (Appendix 5).<sup>5</sup> The Igbo-ukwu finds probably pre-date the advent of European trade at the coast. Table 9 summarizes the nature of the Igbo-ukwu finds for the benefit of those unable to get hold of the reports of Professor Thurstan Shaw, now published in two volumes. The Ezira archaeological materials are similar in some respects to Igbo-ukwu.<sup>6</sup> These

archaeological finds suggest the existence of a pre-industrial economy based on a domestic technology supported by trade, agriculture and religion.

David Northrup's analysis of 'The growth of trade among the Igbo before 1800' has thrown more light onto the nature of Igbo economy and to some extent that of Nri and the Aro. His exposition deals primarily with the pattern of 'long distance trade' and 'regional trade'. But the validity of the core of his argument needs to be re-examined. He argues: 'While the growth of the slave trade appears to have been handled without major changes in the overall patterns of trade along the lower Niger, in the Igbo hinterland a new marketing "grid", dominated by the Arochukwu traders, was created using the pre-existent regional trading networks and religious values as a base.'<sup>7</sup>

Table 9 Summary of Igbo-Ukwu Finds

(Abridged from Shaw, 1970. Vol. 1, pp. 97-325, Vol. II, plates 185-510)

Finds	Number	Description of Major Objects
Iron	c 20	Blades, razors, calabash fittings, staples, nails, rod with loop, rings, coiled ring, bosses.
Copper and Bronze	110 major 575 minor	Receptacles: roped pot, altar stand, annular pot stand, snail shells, bowls (crescentic, pear shaped, and large), calabash handles, spiral bosses. Personal ornaments: pendants, bronze bells, composite bronze bells, chains, simple anklets, looped anklets, knotted wristlets, heavy anklets, knotted wristlets, heavy knotted wristlets (Manillas?), crown, pectoral plate, finger rings, bronze plaque, copper beads. Ceremonial objects: ornate bronze staff heads (various types), cylindrical ornaments, spiral snakes. Skulls: leopard, rams, elephants, human faces. Insects: grasshopper (locust?), beetles (?), flies (?). Miscellaneous: eggs, birds, nails, fanholders, hilts, scabbard-supports, long rod, knotted rods, bars and copper wires, Janus headed ornaments, bronze horseman hilt, copper spiral, conical bosses.
Pottery	21, 784 pieces c 18 whole	Water pots, cooking pots and bowls, ritual pots (deeply grooved), stopper and pot lids, pottery pegs.
Beads	165,000	Stone beads: quartz, carnelian - different shapes and sizes. Glass beads: (more glass beads than stone beads).
Textiles	Fragments from 3 sites	Plain weave: (a) base-type fibre; (b) grass or lead fibres; (c) 'S' or 'Z' twist directions in the single and folded yarns.
Bone	Numerous	Human, Duiker, small antelope, monkey or cat, goat, fish, large ungulate (not cow).
Shell	1	Freshwater mussel.
Ivory	c 3	Elephant tusks (evidence of carved surface on one).
Calabash	40 pieces 14 pieces	With incised decoration. With copper handles and bosses attached.
Stone	Up to 60 pieces	(a) Water-worn quartz pebbles; (b) Ferruginous gritty sandstone and pebble; (c) Rubbing stones of ferruginous grit.

Note: Compare Table 9 with Table 10 and note the striking similarities in terms of types and description. Another striking aspect is the similarity of style which can only be seen by examining the objects.



Northrup's analysis was unable to cope satisfactorily with the patterns of the regional trade and the religious values, but it is striking that he was able to throw useful light on the matter with

the limited data and evidence he had. It is not appropriate to argue as he did that the major patterns of trade did not change with the growth of the slave trade. Evidence based on my field



Table 10 Ethnographic Material in Odinani Museum, Nri

Collection	Description	Uses and Remarks
Iron	Blades, razors, nails, ceremonial spears, swords, knives, fan holders.	(a) Used for rituals and ceremonials. (b) All similar to Igbo-ukwu in form and design.
Copper and Bronze	Bronze bells, copper bells, copper wire, copper wristlets, manilla.	(a) Used for rituals and ceremonials. (b) Similar to Igbo-ukwu.
Pottery	Water pots, cooking pots, ritual pots (all deeply grooved).	(a) Domestic and ritual. (b) Similar to Igbo-ukwu in style and design.
Woodwork	Spears, ritual objects, utensils, anklets, wristlets.	(a) Ritual and ceremonial. (b) Similar to Igbo-ukwu bronze objects in shape.
Beads	Stone beads Glass beads	(a) Ritual and ceremonial (b) Similar to Igbo-ukwu.
Textiles and Basketry	Cotton cloths, fibre cloths.	(a) Ritual and ceremonial. (b) Fibre cloths are used by masqueraders. Fibre and leaf cloth found at Igbo-ukwu.
Shell	Fresh water shells, cowries.	Fresh water mussel shell found at Igbo-ukwu.
Bones	Skull of bush cow, rams, horse.	(a) Ritual: skull of ram used for purification. (b) Ceremonial; (c) Skulls of rams, etc. and horse man found at Igbo-ukwu.
Calabash	Crescentic shape, bowl shape.	(a) Domestic and ritual; (b) These shapes occurred in bronze objects of Igbo-ukwu, carved calabashes found there.
Stones	Quartz, pebbles, ferruginous.	(a) Similar to Igbo-ukwu; (b) Stones have ritual significance and are placed on shrines.

work indicates that major patterns of trade, both 'regional' and 'long distance', changed not only in terms of goods traded but also in terms of routes used.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Northrup's analysis ignored one important aspect of Igbo and Nri economy that also determined the direction of the trade routes. This was the invisible trade in the form of services. The general picture in the pre-eighteenth century was probably as follows. Some Igbo towns specialized in certain services, in making local pre-industrial goods and in agricultural production. Some areas were probably very rich, others poor. The area around Nri has poor soil and limited agricultural produce to support its dense population. Southern Igbo land was well supplied with oil palm trees and northern Igbo country was rich in yams but poor in palm produce.<sup>9</sup> The districts around Nri-Awka were well-supplied with craftsmen and ritual specialists. North-east Igbo land was rich in mineral deposits – iron ore, lead, tin, copper and salt.<sup>10</sup> Table 11 shows the occupational distribution of the population, and Map 5 shows the geographical. Map 6 shows the network of trade routes as they were in the pre-eighteenth

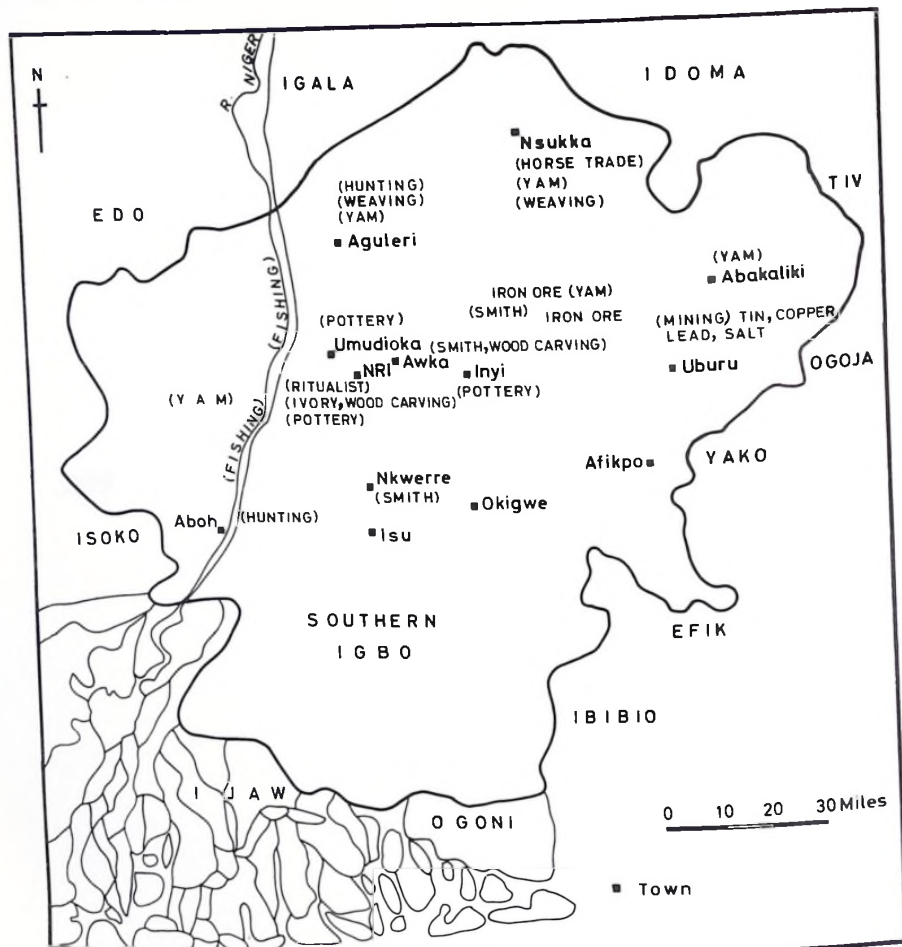
century and late nineteenth century when the trans-Atlantic slave trade had ceased.<sup>11</sup> The important settlements of the hinterland were linked by a network of trade routes and the peace of Nri prevailed.

As Map 6 shows, probably three important trade routes linked the hinterland with the north, two with the west, two with the east and four with the south. The volume of goods distributed in the long distance trade was probably less during the pre-eighteenth century because only prestige commodities were handled. It is probable that the Igbo at the border exchanged their products with their neighbours and passed them on to visiting Igbo traders, especially Nri men. Thus, horses entered the hinterland through Nsukka, and certain types of beads were obtained from Igala and Idoma through the Anambra river and Nsukka respectively. But the southern routes were very important because fish and salt were obtained from the south. It is probable that the Nri Igbo monopolized trade and ritual in the north-western hinterland.

The slave trade disrupted this pattern of trade. By the middle of the eighteenth and the early

Table 11 Occupational Differentiation in the Northern Igbo Hinterland – 18th to 20th centuries.

Occupation	Towns	Product
Ritualist	Nri	Religious doctrine, dogma, rituals and objects.
Smiths	Awka Agbaja Nkwerre	Copper and Bronze: Copper and bronze bells, ornaments; brass coils, rings, wristlets, anklets, beads, cast pots. Iron: Musical instruments: gongs. Agricultural equipment: hoes, cutlasses, digging rods. Ceremonial equipment: swords, spearheads. Others: hings, locks, traps, guns.
Weavers	Nsukka, Aguleri.	Loin cloths, mask cloths and costumes.
Potters	Inyi, Achi, Orlu, Enugu-Agidi and Isu (north of Awka).	Cooking pots, water pots, ritual pots, ceremonial pots, musical pots. Beads.
Ivory Carvers	Nri	Ritual ivory, 'status' ivory, wristlets, anklets.
Wood Carvers	Uga, Awka.	Ceremonial utensils, chairs, doors, musical instruments, ritual objects, ritual images, masks.
Body Artists	Umudioka groups	<i>Ichi</i> marks on face, body marks, hair dressing.
Hunters	Aguleri, Egbema	Elephant tusks.
Miners	Towns north of Abakiliki, e.g. Uburu.	Salt, tin, copper, lead.
Long Distance Traders	Nri	Ritual and prestige objects, yams, livestock, horses.
Horse Traders	Nsukka and Udi	Horses from the north
Yam Farmers	West Igbo towns, Aguleri area, Abakiliki area, Nsukka area.	Yam.
Fishermen	Riverain Igbo: Oguta, Atani.	Fish, salt.



Map 5 Occupational Specialization in Northern Igbo Culture Area  
18th to 20th Centuries

nineteenth centuries the internal regional trade had changed dramatically. Local industries were disrupted, the Abakiliki mines closed down, yam production was reduced and cassava took over. Areas with poor soil could now depend on cassava. The old craftsmen disappeared into slavery and even Nri men were captured and transported. Captain Adam's observation of the attitude of Nri

slaves becomes very relevant in this context.<sup>12</sup>

Because trading interests ensured a steady demand for slaves at the coastal entrepôts, the earlier network of routes gave way to the newer parallel patterns that ran north to south (Map 7). The process was as follows.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Aro settlements were founded at the southern frontier

of Nri sphere of influence at Aro-Ndizuogu. Later, new Aro settlements were located at Ndiekelionwu, Ndiokpalaeze, south-east of Nri.<sup>13</sup> Other Aro settlements were sited at Afikpo and Nike area south east of Nri area.

The Aro leaders had the acumen to goad Igbo towns into fighting and raiding one another. The idea was to obtain slaves to exchange for European goods. European goods such as gunpowder, iron bars, copper bars, tobacco, gin and salt from the coast reached the hinterland through three main routes: the Niger river, the Imo river and Akwete, and through Arockukwu. The Aro controlled two of these Eastern routes and thus monopolized the trade in the eastern sector. Attempts were made by the Aro to gain control of the towns in the western sector, but these attempts were resisted by Eze Nri and by many towns like Awka, Agulu and Ihiala.

Nri elders remember wars between towns that were instigated by Aro men, especially Okolie Ijoma of Ndiekelionwu, who specialized in hiring out Abam, Ada and Abriba fighters to towns and supplying them with guns and gunpowder. Tradition says that Achalla invaded Igboarim, Oraukwu invaded Adazi, Agulu invaded Abatete, Awkuzu invaded Nteje, Oba invaded Ojoto, etc. Adjacent towns became bitter enemies. They no longer traded with one another. The 'peace' of Nri based on ritualism was shattered by brute force. The Igbo turned to slave trading and abandoned local crafts and industries.

This new trade gave birth to new trade routes that linked important slave trading towns with Aro settlements and the coast. The old network routes that characterized peaceful trade gave way to the parallel routes running north to south, along which slaves were conveyed. This is the major point which Northrup missed in his account.

The effect of this new situation on the Nri system was far-reaching. The Nri kingdom which was situated in the hinterland, was, due to the emphasis laid on the coastal trade, cut off from active participation in the coastal trade, while internal trade gradually diminished to serve only local needs.

In pre-European days, the location of Nri seemed strategic in the trade route patterns of the hinterland. With the advent of the European coastal trade, trade routes followed the river courses. Thus Onitsha, Bonny and Arochukwu

grew into important trade centres. The geographical location of Nri, formerly advantageous, became disadvantageous, not only during the period of the trans-Atlantic trade but also during the colonial period. This was one reason why successive Eze Nri condemned Aro activities, and in one case Eze Nri Enweleana organized military resistance against Aro incursion into his sphere of influence. But the forces of the semi-militarized Aro system, backed by the much desired European goods, were greater than that of the ritualized Nri system. The Nri system gradually recoiled under these major forces.

### The Patterns of Production

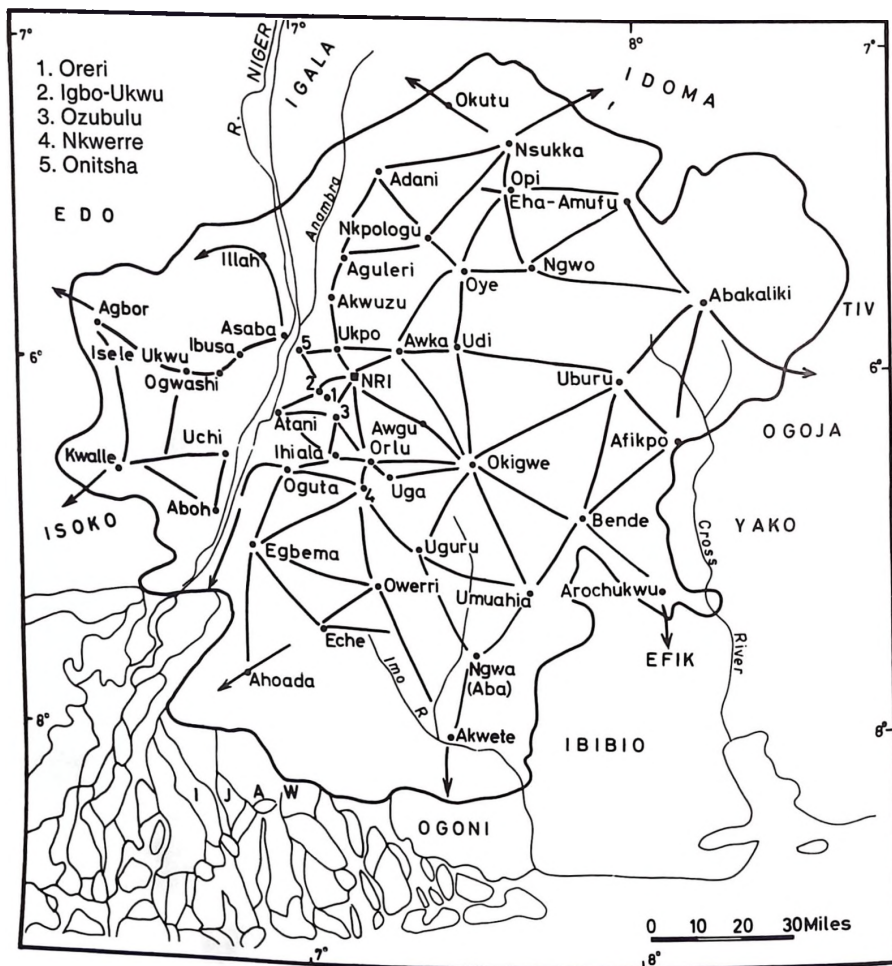
In Chapter 3 I showed how Nri religion is tied up with the concept of work, success and wealth. The sources of wealth were the products of land, such as yam, kola nut trees, palm trees and iroko trees, livestock, salt, cowry currency, copper rods, iron rods, *ofo* staffs, skill in ritual and crafts, having many dependents such as wives, children, friends and relatives and, during the slave trade, having many slaves. The sources of wealth were limited and scarce because Nri was ecologically poor.

In the past, as at present, Nri people did not rely directly on agriculture but relied indirectly on it by ritually controlling the farming of subsistence crops in most Igbo settlements where farming was the principal occupation.

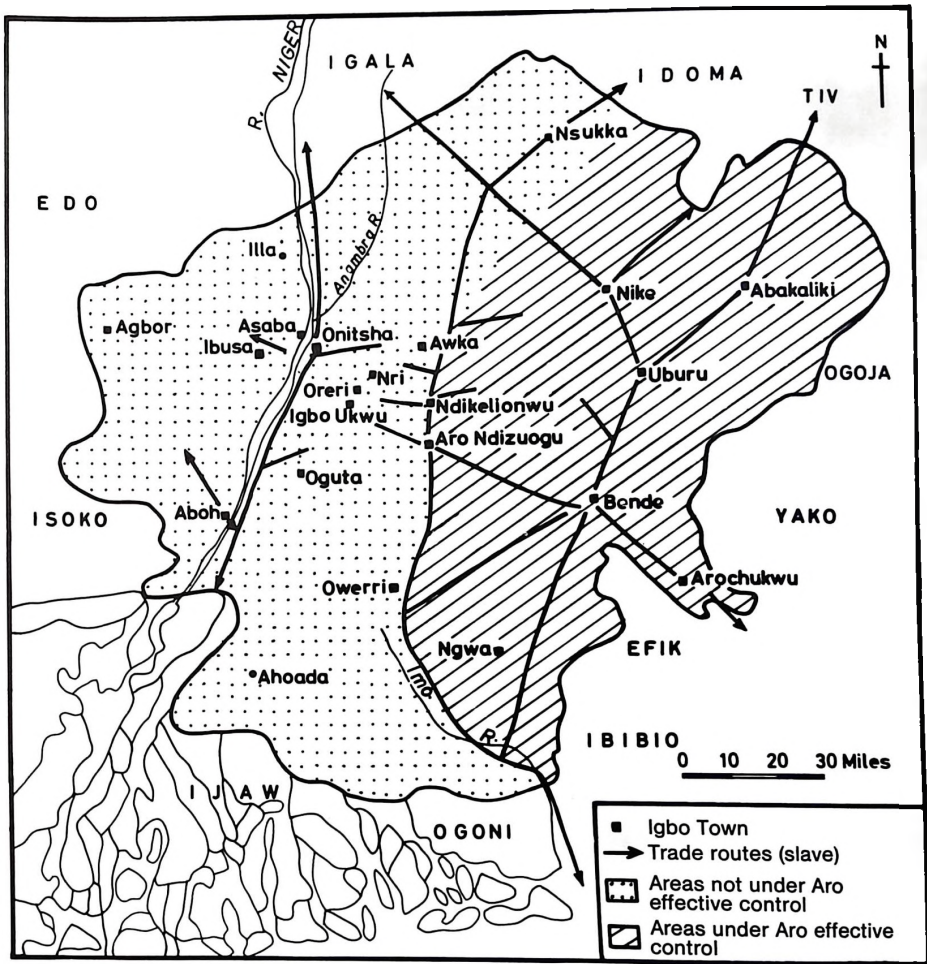
Statistical figures collected in 1967 and 1971–1972, (given in Tables 12, 13 and 14), show that the Nri population is very dense, and the ecological study in Chapter 1 explained that the soil is poor. At present the Nri are farmers, traders, businessmen, ritualists, public servants and teachers. Most of the farmers live outside Nri and those at home have plots that may best be called gardens. About 75% of the population live outside Nri, a percentage that points to the problems raised by its high density and poor soil.

There is evidence that from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century similar conditions of high density existed. Apart from the evidence in oral tradition, the occurrence of Nri lineages over an area of about 4,500 square miles east and west of the river Niger and the nature of the material culture that I collected from Nri and other neighbouring towns, suggest that the major economic activities of Nri were not in Nri but outside Nri. Table 10 shows the description of these objects,





Map 6 Trade Routes: Network Pattern of Pre-18th and Post-19th Centuries



Map 7 Trade Routes: Parallel Pattern of Mid-18th to Late 19th Century



Plate 14 Women dancing in Eke market square, Nri.

which were obtained by trade and payments for services.

The close similarities of those objects that are considered as wealth to those represented in the Igbo-ukwu finds, suggest that Nri items of material wealth might have remained similar even though the pattern of obtaining them changed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In Chapter 6 I discuss the structure of a compound in which several simple or compound families live. The compound as a productive economic unit was organized into farming groups, trading groups, ritual groups and craft groups. A compound had at least two or more of these simple groups, of which one was the farming group. A person could be a member of two groups. The groups are therefore functionally defined. Composite groups could be formed when two or more simple groups of different but related compounds combined to pursue a specific activity. Thus two simple ritual groups of different compounds could combine as a composite ritual group to undertake a ritual contract. Leadership in each group was based on knowledge and experience. Thus a father may be the head of a ritual group while his eldest son, who has

learned the craft of carving from an uncle, may be the head of the craft group.

Nri people believe that all forms of production were introduced and authorized by Eze Nri. The validation for production was derived from the body of religious 'mythology' that Nri people disseminated in one form or another in most Igbo settlements in the past. In this way they were able to control the religious aspect of production.

#### *The Farming Group*

'There was famine.  
Eze Nri called on Chukwu for food.  
Chukwu said: "Offer your first son and first daughter."  
They were made *ichi* marks.  
They were offered to Chukwu.  
After twelve days,  
On the grave of the son,  
Grew yam and palm oil.  
On the grave of the daughter,  
Grew cocoyam and maize and vegetable.  
Chukwu said: "Distribute all these to all Igbo  
And receive tribute from them".'

(From Nri Religious Myth)<sup>14</sup>

The farming group comprised a man, his adult children, his wife or wives and his servants. The units composed of males farmed the gardens of the man, which were located in Nri, and his farms

Table 12 Population Statistics: 1967 and 1971-72

Population	Approximately 10,000
Area	c. 6 square miles
Density	1,666.6 per square mile
Birth rate	7.5%
Death rate	1.25%
Growth rate	6.6%

Table 13 Percentage of Men in Different Occupations

Wards	Farmers	Businessmen Traders, Craft	Ritualists	Government Workers	Teachers
Agukwu	21.2%	46.6%	6.3%	19.9%	6%
Akamkpisi	24.5%	53.2%	5.1%	13.1%	4.1%
Diodo	22.5%	57.0%	5.3%	18.8%	3.4%

Sample of adult males in Agukwu - 1,271. Sample of adult males in Akamkpisi - 408. Sample of adult males in Diodo - 87.

Table 14 Percentage at Home and Abroad

Wards	% at Home	% Abroad
Agukwu	21.4%	78.6%
Akamkpisi	28.2%	71.8%
Diodo	24.2%	75.8%

Sample of adult males in Agukwu: 6,144. Sample of adult males in Akamkpisi: 2,181. Sample of adult males in Diodo: 486.

Note: Percentages based on data collected by the author in 1967 and 1971-72 while conducting field work in Nri.

located in some distant Igbo village in the south of the Anambra area or Nsukka and Agbana area or in the West Igbo towns west of the river Niger, where land is more fertile and plentiful. The units composed of females farmed the gardens allocated to them by their husbands. Each wife had her own garden where she grew cocoyam, maize and vegetables and cassava which she used in feeding her unit. Wives weeded and harvested crops on their husbands' farms.

The units composed of males mainly cultivated yam and their farms were associated with the yam cult *Ifejioku*. This is the cult of general fertility of all farm crops mentioned in the myth above. The male units left home to farm in their distant farms and visited home occasionally during certain important ritual months and during harvest. On their return each sent eight or sixteen big yams to Eze Nri as tribute and acknowledgement of their successes, which they believed emanated from the ritual power of Eze Nri. The males in these groups also kept some livestock: chickens, goats, sheep and one or two dwarf cattle. (The ritual

power of Eze Nri is discussed in Chapter 5).

In the past Eze Nri had his own garden. It was really a ritual garden where he initiated all the farming activities of each month and season; for example, if he did the first planting during the planting month on one day, the day after others would begin planting. It was believed that Eze Nri controlled the yam medicine called *ogwu ji*. During the announcing of the new year, called *igwu aro*, Igbo settlements sent their leaders to Nri to receive the yam medicine and the blessing of the year from Eze Nri. They also brought their tribute of cows, goats, sheep, cowries, elephant tusks, yams and fowl to Eze Nri.<sup>15</sup>

The leaders of Igbo towns that visited Eze Nri's palace did so through Eze Nri's agents living in their settlements. The measure of the agent's success depended on his ability to convince the Igbo settlements under his ritual jurisdiction to send a handsome present to Eze Nri. The tribute stipulated by custom was one goat, one sheep, one fowl and a bundle of sixteen yams and eight kola nuts. (See Chapter 9.)





Plate 15 Market scene at Igbo-ukwu

### *The Trading Groups*

'Chukwu sent strange visitors to Eze Nri.  
They came, four strangers with baskets.  
They refused to disclose their names.  
In the night Eze Nri discovered their names,  
By sending rats into their baskets...  
In the morning Eze called them:  
Eke! Oye! Ofo! Nkwo!  
Eze's wisdom was praised.  
And they said: "Have four markets and four days.  
Call them Eke, Oye, Afo, Nkwo".  
They vanished.'

*(From Nri Religious Myth)*

Thus according to the myth the Nri people believe that Eze Nri introduced the four markets and the four day week called *Izu*. All Igbo towns had these four markets, which were held daily for both religious, economic and social reasons. (Plate 14).

A group of related towns could decide to attend each other's markets according to a set pattern of rotation. Important markets flourished in certain geographically strategic and economically important towns in different parts of Igbo land, like Oye Toro Nri, Nkwo Enugu-uku and Nkwo Igbo-ukwu (Plate 15).

In the past, some of the activities of most of the

markets in the hinterland, especially in the northern part of Igbo culture area, were directly controlled by Eze Nri. For example, the establishment of a new market, which also involved the building and consecration of the market *Alusi*, and the closure of an old market, which also involved the removal and transfer of the *Alusi*, were, in most towns, activities to be referred to Eze Nri, who might permit or refuse. The consecration of the chief priest of the market *Alusi* was generally done by Nri men who gave the chief priest the *ofo* staff of the *Alusi*. In this way the peace of the market was ensured.

The trading group of each compound was made up of a man, his adult children and some other members of his extended family, generally between three and six persons. While the women of the compounds were engaged in trading in subsistence goods in the markets of Nri and neighbouring towns, the male trade groups were chiefly engaged in the distant trade which dealt mainly with goods regarded as wealth, such as salt, livestock, iron and copper rods, elephant tusks, hides and skins and gunpowder.<sup>16</sup>

The group travelled from Nri through successive market towns until they reached the periphery of

Nri influence, and then back to Nri again. One typical route was Nri-Awka-Aguleri-Adana; Nsukka-Opi-Ukehe-Udi-Inyi-Awka-Nri. Such a business trip was called *ipu iji*; it took up to two months. Two or three such trade journeys per year were possible, but shorter journeys were common. On returning successfully from distant trade the leader sent his tribute, in proportion to his profit, to Eze Nri and offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving to his personality cults.

On these journeys Nri men were generally not molested, because they enjoyed a type of 'diplomatic immunity'. They were regarded as the children of Eze Nri, *Nwa Nri*, or *Nshi* or *Nhi*, depending on dialect. They were easily identifiable by their facial marks, *ichi*, and the staffs called *otonsi* which they carried on their shoulders.

### *The Ritual Groups*

'Eze Nri Ifikuanim established the Ozo title. He gave it to the Igbo through his Nri agents. He told the Igbo to do like Nri men, to take titles and observe the taboos. He told Nri men to give *ofo* and *alo* to all Igbo chiefs.'

(From Nri Oral Tradition).

The ritual groups had the same composition as the trade groups but were smaller in number, ranging from three to four persons, and all might have taken the *ichi* title. In the past, the permission to operate as a ritual group had to be given by Eze Nri and his council. The head of the group could be fined or suspended for a time if found guilty of misconduct.

The group was specialized in the rituals of installing *ozo*-titled men, abrogating and enacting taboos, cleansing abomination, ordaining the priest of *Alusi*, making all types of shrines and removing evil spirits. They were also experts in the *Agbala* cult. They supervised various oath taking, *inwu iyi*, and settled disputes between fighting settlements. In addition, they interpreted Igbo traditions and customs. The head of the group was regarded as a special agent, the mouthpiece of Eze Nri, and was called *nkita uku eze*, meaning 'Eze's dog messenger'.

Eze Nri divided up Igbo land into areas of control and operation thus: all ritual groups from Agukwu operated in certain defined areas, while groups from Diodo-Akamkpisi operated anywhere. In Agukwu, Agbadana usually operated in towns

north of Nri as far as Nsukka. Obeagu operated west and south-west of Nri to Nkwere, while Uruoji operated south and south-east of Nri. Areas of control and operation varied from time to time, but the one given here seems to have been the generally accepted pattern. Areas did overlap. A code of conduct was followed, and when doubts and arguments arose, if the lineages concerned failed to resolve the matter, it was referred to Eze Nri and his council. A kind of 'secret language' was developed so that the head of the ritual groups could send messages backwards and forwards to Nri court and to the operators of *Agbala* Nri and to other Nri ritual groups in the neighbourhood.

These groups were also called the 'ears' and the 'eyes' of Eze Nri. Like the trading groups, they were identified by the *ichi* marks on their faces and by the *otonsi* staffs they carried. They also enjoyed a type of 'diplomatic immunity' like the trade groups.<sup>17</sup>

The ritual and political services that the group rendered to settlements, individually or collectively were paid for in cowry currency or in kind. On returning to Nri the head of the group reported the events of his mission to Eze Nri and gave him his traditional share. For example, for every *ozo* man whom the group installed and gave an *ofo*, the group was paid as bargained, and Eze Nri's share was 240,000 cowries, (called *nnu afia*, valued at £50 in 1920 but valued at £1 in 1968), and one she-goat.

### *The Craft Groups*

'And the earth was soft when Eri came.  
Chukwu sent a smith,  
Who dried it with charcoal and bellows.  
...The descendants of the smith  
Made hoes, knives and carving tools.  
The *ichi* marks were made on  
The face of Eze Nri's son and daughter.  
These artists are called Dioka.'

(From Nri Religious Myth)

In Nri the craft groups were fewer in number and each group specialized in various crafts such as wood carving and weaving; very few were smiths.<sup>18</sup> A craft group might be a man and his two apprentices. They carved wood and made various wooden utensils, images for the *Alusi* and ancestor altars, and ritual masks, and they also made textiles for ritual masks with plant fibres obtained locally.



Plate 16 A woman offering gifts to the priest of Alusi Iyazi, associated with afo market in Nri.

Plate 17 (right) Brother of the deceased offering gifts to mother's brother and members of patrilineage during mortuary rites. (Agbadana maximal lineage). The author is on the far right of the picture.

Plate 18 (right, bottom) Father-in-law (sitting) in front of his temple accepting gift of 8 yams, a hen and 4 kola nuts from his son-in-law during the Onwa Asato month of the Nri calendar.

Women also formed craft groups; a woman, her daughter and women from other compounds formed a craft group specialized in weaving cotton loin cloths or in pottery. This group might also be expert in body painting and marking and in traditional hairdressing.

Another specialized group in Nri was the ivory carvers. Ceremonial ivories were and still are carved in Nri. The maximal lineage of Agbadana is still famous for this delicate work of art. Two or three persons specialized in it formed a group. They might be close or distant relations. They travelled to Aguleri and to Ikom where they obtained tusks to carve. The prices of the large types ranged between £10 and £50 in the late nineteenth century, and today cost between £100 and £300 (about ₦200 and ₦600).

### The Patterns of Distribution

The distributive mechanisms used in Nri were as follows: reciprocity, redistribution, the market principles and the capital market.

### Reciprocity

In Nri, gifts follow lines of kinship and friendship. Gifts of various types were exchanged between in-laws, friends, associates and age-grades. But certain types of gift are institutionalized. For example, every month in the Nri religious calendar is associated with a religious ceremony. During this period gifts of yam, chickens and money are made to the priest of a particular *Alusi* of the month, who in return establishes a ritual relationship with the *Alusi* for the good of the people. (Plate 16). Similarly, during mortuary rites gifts are moved from one lineage to another: for example, the deceased person's patrilineage sends stipulated gifts to the person's mother's patrilineage. (Plate 17). During marriage considerable wealth is transferred from the groom's patrilineage to the bride's patrilineage, and once a year, during the eighth lunar month of the Nri calendar, in-laws are expected to give stipulated gifts to their fathers-in-law. The transferring of such a gift is shown in Plate 18. These types of reciprocity are









Plate 19 Gifts collected in Eze Nri's palace are redistributed by helpers.

institutionalized and a great deal of wealth flows through these channels.

#### *Redistribution*

I have shown how tributes of various types, and payments, are made to Eze Nri. Indeed, Eze Nri depended on his subjects for his wealth. Territorial acquisition and royal property were, and still are, absent in this system. Nri people say: 'Eze Nri has everything and yet nothing.' By this they mean that it is taboo for him to work or trade or to be engaged in any craft. He has only his personal land, which he acquired before his coronation. He owns the whole of Nri, though the parts of Nri are owned by the various maximal lineages. He cannot take the land from any of the lineages, but he can authorize the use of any land for public use after consultation with the lineages that own it.

In the past his palace and temple were built and maintained by communal labour and all tributes sent to Eze Nri were divided up. A third was kept for his personal use, a third given to the Adama lineages that appoint officers of his inner chamber, and a third was divided into two: Agukwu took one part and Diodo-Akamkpisi took the other. All payments made to Eze in connection with the

taking of *ozo* titles belonged to him. Fines in the palace court were shared between the Eze and the people.

This system of sharing is not limited to the state level only. Sharing takes place at the collective temples of the various levels of lineages. As the Eze's palace is a collection and distribution centre for the state, so also the various temples associated with the ranked lineages are to a certain extent collection and distribution centres for the lineages. (Plate 19).

#### *The Market Principles*

I have discussed the importance of markets in Nri and in Igbo land and shown how marketing for profit dominated the economic system. I have also shown pre-eighteenth century and post-eighteenth century trade routes and the effect of the slave trade on these routes and on local industries, crafts and services. Here I shall deal with other aspects of marketing.

The principal currency for trading was cowries, *ego ayo*. A sophisticated system of using cowries as a medium of exchange and valuation was developed in the Igbo culture area. The system of calculation and the table of conversion used in the

Nri area in the late nineteenth century was as follows:

### Cowry Currency

1 <i>Mkpulu ego</i> =	1 cowry
6 <i>Mkpulu ego</i> =	6 cowries = 1 <i>Isi ego</i>
10 <i>Isi ego</i> =	60 cowries = 1 <i>Ukwu</i>
20 <i>Ukwu</i> =	1,200 cowries = 1 <i>Afia</i>
20 <i>Ufia</i> =	24,000 cowries = 1 <i>Akpa</i> or <i>Ili afia</i>
10 <i>Akpa</i> (bags) =	240,000 cowries = 1 <i>Nnu afia</i>

Fowl and dogs were valued in *ukwu*, goats and sheep in *afia*, cows, slaves and land in *ili afia*. Bride wealth was negotiated in *nnu*, never to exceed four *nnu afia*. Iron bars and rods, copper bars and rods and manillas were all valued in terms of cowries. In order to facilitate carrying them around for transactions, cowries were strung together in rows of sixes and sewn permanently on mats in bundles of 6, 1,200, 24,000 and 240,000. The mats were rolled. Loose ones were tied in bags of 24,000, called *akpa*.

At the beginning of the century, the British introduced the £.s.d. currency system – this new system was resisted in various ways. First a dual currency system developed. Traditional goods were sold in cowries and European goods in the British currency. Later, cowries could buy British currency and British currency could buy cowries. By a system of haggling, the exchange rate varied and was determined by several factors. As more European goods began to penetrate the hinterland and old cowries degenerated without replacement, the British currency, backed by law, became dominant. In 1925 the following rate of exchange was still operating in many rural markets:

10 cowries =	¼d
60 cowries =	3d
120 cowries =	6d
240 cowries =	1/-
1,200 cowries =	5/-
2,400 cowries =	£1
24,000 cowries =	£5
120,000 cowries =	£25 (lowest bride wealth)

In Nri a rudimentary local banking system developed. During the slave trade period, men with strong buildings began to keep the cowries of other people in return for commission. Such men became very rich and were able to give capital loans to persons who wished to begin a trading venture. No fixed rate of interest was paid. One had to haggle over the interest, called *omulunwa*,

on the principal, *isi ego*. Other systems of borrowing were adopted, such as being given a piece of land in lieu of a smaller amount of cowries than would normally buy the land, redeemable with agreed interest over a given period.

Another system of credit was developed within the *ozo* alliance group. In this system a person who had taken the *ozo* title belonged to one of the *ozo* alliance groups called *ogwe mmuo*. In 1972, apart from the cost of feasting, one paid ₦320 cash to one's *ogwe mmuo* to take the *ozo* title. ₦120 was for *ofo* and ₦200 for *obunsi*. These payments were shared by those who had taken the title. Table 15 gives an example of an account of such payments and shares in 1969. One could buy up to seven *ofo*. Table 16 shows one such payment and share made in 1969.<sup>19</sup> Such a person was given a bonus of one *ofo*, making him the holder of nine *ofo* including the *ofo-ozo*. The total cost in 1972 would have been ₦1160. He was entitled to nine shares whenever a new person took the title and made payment.

One could sell his *ofo*, except three, within his *ozo* group at a loss or profit whenever he was in need of money. He could use his *ofo* as a security for a loan anywhere in Nri. During the period the *ofo* was a security for the loan; the person giving the loan took the share allocated to the *ofo* whenever payments of shares were made, until the capital and the interest were paid back by the owner of the *ofo*.

If a man died, his first son inherited the nine *ofo* and the shares of the nine *ofo*. The shares of the *ofo-ozo* lapsed two years after the person's death. Of the eight left the son could use one in taking the *ozo* title. If he did this he would continue to take shares accruing from his own *ofo* and those he inherited. If he had brothers, the *ofo* of their father was shared according to the rules of Nri inheritance. Thus the *ofo*, the staff of ritual and political authority, was converted into a type of share or security certificate. This was how ritual, politics and economics were interwoven in the Nri system, one reinforcing the other.

In Nri thinking the three systems of distribution discussed above are, to this day, distinct, and each serves a different purpose. Transactions of this kind generate conflicts due to success and failure, competition, bad faith, cheating and jealousy. These conflicts are resolved at the lineage level or at the state level, depending on the status

of those involved and on the magnitude of the matter.

### *Patterns of Consumption*

In Nri one has to distinguish between two main types of consumption of accumulated wealth: the domestic and the social. Domestic consumption is that aspect of consumption which is used to keep and maintain oneself and all members of one's household. Social consumption is that aspect which is used to obtain status symbols; it is similar to what Veblen called 'conspicuous' consumption.

In the Nri system the accumulation of wealth is paramount because one has to take titles for one's

children and for oneself. Title taking moves one up the social ladder. It is the road towards lineage or state leadership. Each title taken involves the distribution of wealth. From my calculations, to take all titles in Nri, with the exception of the Nri title, would have cost up to £2,000 in 1971. In terms of the value of the pound to cowries in 1920, this equals 122 million cowries. Taking the Nri title between 1933 and 1937 cost the present Eze Nri approximately £500 by his own calculation. This was indeed a large sum of money by Nigerian standards at that time.

In the next Chapter, I examine Nri leadership, how it is achieved and how it is integrated into the total structure.

Table 15 Extracts from an Account Book of an *Ozo* Alliance

This is the account of payments made in respect of *ofo* purchases and number of shares paid out to *ofo* holders of each lineage member.

Payments	£	s	d	Shares to Lineages	No:	£	s	d
27th September 1969	60	0	0	27th September 1969				
Nweke Omenankiti				<i>Ofo</i> Shares	10/- each			
				Umu Agu	47	23	10	0
				Umu Ezekammadu	23	11	10	0
				Umu Mbe	36	18	0	0
				Umu Nri-Obeagu	7	3	10	0
				Total	113	56	10	0
				To young men		1	10	0
				To other strangers		1	10	0
				To clerk			10	0
				Balance with Nwogbo Okoye			10	0
Total	60	0	0	Total		60	0	0
<i>Obunsi</i> :	100	0	0	<i>Obunsi</i> shares	£2 5s each			
Former balance with Nwogbo Okoye	3	10	0	Umu Agu	27	60	15	0
				Umu Ezekammadu	5	11	5	0
				Umu Mbe	6	13	10	0
				Umu Nri Obeagu	5	11	5	0
				Total	42	96	15	0
				Balance with Nwogbo Okoye		3	10	0
				Total		100	0	0
Grand Total	103	10	0	Grand Total		103	10	0

Note: Shares of *Ofo* *Ozo* and *Obunsi* are kept separately because the number of holders of each of these shares differs from lineage to lineage.

Table 16 Account of Payment made for the Purchase of 7 *Ofo* by Ekemezie Ugoji

Ofo Payment	£	s	d	Name of Umunna Shares at £4 10s each	No. of shares	£	s	d
31st January 1969								
(a) Payment made for <i>Ifeko ofo</i> purchasing 7 <i>ofo</i> staffs at £60 each	420	0	0	Umuagu Umuezekamadu Umu Mbe Umu Nri Obeagu Total To Alfred Ekwonu Total To balance	46 14 27 7 94  426 5	207 63 121 31 423 3 10 0 0	0 0 10 10 0 10 0 0	
(b) Payment for drinks	11	10	0	Total To balance		426 5	10 0	0 0
Grand Total	431	10	0	Grand Total		431	10	0

## CHAPTER FOUR: NOTES

1. Dr E.J. Alagoa shares this view, too. Most of those who express discontent over the use of oral traditions use them if they support their theory and drop them when they counter their theory. My belief is that oral traditions that are cross-checked by evidence other than oral tradition can be more valid than many written documents based on casual observations. (see Appendix 1).

2. J. VANSINA, *Oral Tradition*.

3. Such informants are Nwaokoye Odenigbo, Akunne, Anidomaka, Aniolo of Nri, Nwaokoye Awka of Awka, Okeke Oji – as descendant of Ijomaime of Ndiikelionwu: Nwaokonkwo, Okoloye Nri Agu and Onyekwelu – all of Oreri, Ezemba of Igbo-ukwu, Ugwode Nwebe and Ukpuze Nwugwu – of Itchi, Nsukka, Achilonu of Ihara, Owerri, and Agbalaka – of Aguleri. (see Appendix 4). All these informants talked of a period of peaceful trade that existed long before the advent of the Abam and Ada who were agents of Aro slave-dealers. When asked how long, they said 'Our grandfather did not see peaceful days, they were only told by their fathers.' This pattern of thinking is widespread. Other evidence supports the view that the pre-eighteenth century period was more peaceful than the eighteenth and the post-eighteenth century period in the hinterland. If this is speculation, it is one based on some evidence.

4. D P PEREIRA, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, ed. R. Mauny, 1956, p. 146.

In the early sixteenth century, Duarte Pacheco Pereira described the trade between the eastern Niger delta and the hinterland.

BARBOT, *A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea*, 1746, p. 381.

In 1699 Barbot reported that the Niger trade passed through a series of middlemen up and down the river. An illustration of two swords said to be made by smiths in Igbo hinterland was included.

O. EQUIANO, *op. cit.*

Olaudah Equiano, born of Igbo parentage in 1745 in the Igbo hinterland, was captured as a slave in about 1755 and wrote his book in England in 1789. He reported about traders who traded fire arms, gunpowder, hats, beads and fish for

slaves and salt. The number of times he was sold from when he was captured to when he reached the coast suggests the 'stage type' pattern of trade. He also talked of the crafts and industry of his town.

It is significant that he did not mention the Aro after his six to seven months' journey to the coast. This seems to support the view expressed by Nri elders that Aro influence started to be felt during the time of Okolie Ijoma. The genealogy of Ijoma of Ndiikelionwu shows that his grandfather, the founder of Ndiikelionwu settlement, might have done so at the end of the 18th century. Eze Enweleana, who reigned between 1795 and 1888 (including the interregnum), confronted Okolie Ijoma as shown in Nri history. Evidence showed that the Aro controlled only the trade routes in the eastern half of Igbo land, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century and in the early part of the second half of the nineteenth century.

## J. ADAM, Remarks on the country...etc., 1823, pp. 133–134.

In 1823 Captain John Adam described the trade between the coastal peoples and the Igbo hinterland and the attitude of Nri slaves towards captivity.

R.A.K. OLDFIELD and M. LAIRD, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa in 1832, 1833 and 1834*, 1837, pp. 1. 102, 379–380.

In 1837 Macgregor Laird and R.A.K. Oldfield described the trade on the lower Niger at Aboh. They observed 300 canoes going up the river and bullocks, goats and fowl bartered in exchange for powder and cotton with the peoples of Bonny and Brass.

W. ALLEN and THOMSON, *A Narrative of the Expedition to the River Niger in 1841*, 1848, pp. 23 and 270.

In 1841 Allen and Thomson described the trade in the lower Niger at Aboh, Asaba and Igala and trade between Brass, Bonny and Aboh.

W.B. BAIKIE, *Narrative of an exploring voyage up the River Kwora and Bine 1854*, 1856, p. 317.

In 1856 Baikie reported that Aboh was important in the salt trade which came from Nimbe.

5. Babatunde Lawal has recently argued that Igbo-ukwu should be dated around the sixteenth century. His doubts arise from his inability to grasp the nature of archaeological evidence. The element that prevented textile from decaying



since its burial in the sixteenth century (his own date) would also have prevented it from decaying since the ninth century A.D. (Carbon 14 date).

It is clear that manilla was a hinterland phenomenon – that is what the archaeological find is saying at present. My study of the history of the area and my dating of events based on the genealogy I collected seem to agree with the lower limit of the archaeological dates. At present, there is no evidence yet available to make one doubt the Carbon-14 dates. (Lawal, *Dating Problems of Igbo-Ukwu*, 1973, pp. 1-8.) See Onwuejeogwu's paper on 'The Search for the missing Links in dating and interpreting the Igbo-Ukwu finds, in *Paideuma* 23, 1977 (Not quoted in references).

6. D. HARTLE, *Antiquities in Igbo Land* in African Notes, Special Number, 1972.

7. D. NORTHRUP, *The Growth of Trade among the Igbo*.

8. Northrup's data are from the eye-witness accounts of travellers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the Igbo-ukwu archaeological evidence. To bridge the gap he had to extrapolate backwards from the nineteenth century. Most of his deductions agree with what some of my informants said to me (see Note 4 above). After cross-checking, I accepted their arguments such as Pereira's that the Aro disturbance was recent; Barbot's that peaceful trade occurred earlier, and Equiano's that the Aro caused war and long distance trade became unsafe and so decreased. I have used these arguments in this Chapter to throw more light on Northrup's initial work. (See reference on Pereira, Barbot, Equiano and Hartle's archaeological finds at Ezira dated fifteenth century A.D. and the Igbo-ukwu finds dated ninth century A.D.).

9. Stories of threat of famine collected from this area tally with the ecological problem of soil infertility and erosion in the Nri area.

10. It is now certified by two experienced Igbo miners that tin and copper are present in the Abakiliki mines. Although it needs further investigation, it is a fact previously unknown. It is also confirmed that tin occurs in Calabar and there is evidence of ancient mining in both Calabar and Abakiliki. (Personal communication from S.O. Ochogu, of Obeagu Nri, a miner in the Banchi Plateau for over 30 years, now mining in Abakiliki area).

11. P.D. CURTIN, *The Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1800 in Ajayi and Crowder's History of West Africa*, pp. 240-265.

12. J. ADAMI, *op. cit.*

13. See Note 4 – Equiano, on the foundation of Aro settlements at Ndiakelionwu.

14. This is the most popular version. One other version says that a slave was sacrificed. But Nri elders shouted 'Abomination! No such thing existed. It was made up by persons whose parents were slave-mongers in the past.' (19th century).

15. Such tributes might have been the type mentioned by Major Leonard. During the *Igu aro* ceremony of 1967 which I witnessed, 14 goats, 5 sheep, 2 cows and 385 yams were brought as gifts to Eze Nri by towns that still have emotional and kinship ties with Nri. I asked many of them why they brought these gifts. They said that Eze Nri was their 'father'

and that in the past it had to be done or else Eze would be angry and things would go wrong. Some agreed that Eze Nri ruled (*chi*) them in the past, some denied this and some refused to make a statement. One said that Eze ruled his ancestors, not him, and that he came to Nri because they were *Isi ana*, which means head of the earth cult and giver of its *ofo*. Major Leonard gave a list of towns that sent tribute to Eze Nri around 1895. I cross-checked the list and about 90% were confirmed. (Leonard, *The Lower Niger and Its Peoples*, 1906, pp. 34-37).

16. Nri people are profit-minded as far as business is concerned. Market is *afia*, a ritual-economic place where ritual, economic and social activities are held. Drama and dances are staged in the market square. It is generally the local theatre. Nri distinguish *izu afia* marketing from *igba mgbele*. *Izu afia* can take place only in the market place, but *igba mgbele* can take place anywhere – in the market, at home, on the road. It involves speculation and risk-taking based on some element of luck and trust. I have witnessed a trade transaction between A, B, C and D. A sold his goat to B and B sold the same goat to C on the spot without transfer of the goat or money, for the goat was at A's home and B had no money but C knew D, who wanted a goat and had money to pay immediately. Two days later B and C went and collected the goat from A and C sold it to D who paid immediately. C paid B three days later and B went and paid A immediately. The transaction took about five days to complete. This is called *igba mgbele* and it is a common feature in Igbo marketing system. Hoarding of goods to sell later on, for a profit, is also *igba mgbele*.

17. There are several examples of cases where Nri men were killed in Igbo towns. When this happened, Eze Nri demanded immediate compensation. For fear of the Eze Nri's curse, the compensation was paid immediately. A person from one Igbo settlement could kill a person from another settlement without paying compensation. Such a killing resulted in fighting between the two settlements. Thus Onitsha and Obosi, and Onitsha and Ogidi were constantly fighting in the nineteenth century.

At the close of the nineteenth century, one of Obosi's greatest warriors, called Onukogu, killed a Nri man. Eze Obosi and his Ndi ichie immediately tried the warrior: he was condemned and shot dead by his people. (Iweka, *The History of Obosi and of Ibo-land in Brief*, 1924, pp. 83-85). The Nri version added that the lineage of Onukogu also paid a compensation with a woman. Obosi is about twenty miles west of Nri.

About 1860 three Nri men were killed at Anam. Eze Nri demanded compensation, for which three women were given. The children of two of the women are still alive. The women were the mothers of Ofoedu and Nwandibe of Diodo. The third woman, Mgbafo, died childless.

18. In every Igbo town carvers, smiths, etc., who are citizens of the town, do occur. If a town is not specialized in the craft, such craftsmen are not regarded as experts. If one wants a very fine work one has to employ the experts from the towns that are specialized in the craft.

19. The fact that these titles were taken during the Nigerian Civil War indicates its importance in Nri. Nri town was untouched by the war because it is located in a valley.

## Chapter 5

# The Structure of Leadership

### The Concept of Leadership in Nri

In Nri thought, the head is one of the most important anatomical parts of the body. It is regarded as the seat of wisdom, *amamife*, and the seat of life, *ndu*. After an animal has been sacrificed, the skull is preserved and hung on the wall of the temple. The skull can be used to represent the animal – if a sacrifice involves the use of a goat, and one is not available, an old goat skull can be used symbolically. In the cleansing of abomination, the skull of a ram must be used in the ritual.

In view of the importance of the head, it is not surprising that the word for leader is *onye isi*, meaning the person at the head. The head of all the *ozo* men is called *isi nze*, head of *nze*-titled men; the head of the untitled men is called *isi okolobia*, and the head of an age-grade is called *isi ogboo*. The leader is the adviser of the group and derives the authority to lead from accepted traditional sources.

The king of Nri, though, is not referred to as *onye isi*. He is regarded as the source of leadership and is therefore called *Eze Nri*; this has usually been translated as king of Nri. He is not regarded as a chief.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Eze Nri Obalike refused bluntly to be a warrant chief when he was so appointed by the British in about 1910. Similarly, the present Eze Nrijiro II refused to participate in the election of the appointment of a second-class chief allocated to Njikoka Division in 1960 after the creation of the Eastern House of Chief in (then) Eastern Nigeria on the grounds that he was a natural ruler and not a chief. Only one first-class chief defined as a natural ruler was allocated to Onitsha province, to which Nri belongs administratively. The Obi of Onitsha was appointed first-class chief by the then Eastern Nigerian Regional Government, so Eze Nri preferred to remain in

Nri as *Eze Nri* instead of competing for a second-class chieftainship.

The attitude of Eze Nri Obalike towards the British Government's appointment and Eze Nrijiro's attitude towards being a second-class chief are consistent with Nri political thinking. To them Eze Nri is neither a head man nor a chief. He is a king, the ruler of a kingdom. This attitude is not novel. Major Leonard, Northcote Thomas, Rev. Father Duhaze and a host of British administrative officers were in no doubt when they referred to Nri Obalike as Eze Nri and translated this as King of Nri.

Knowledge, another aspect of leadership as conceptualized by Nri people, is defined in terms of a person's knowledge of Nri traditions and religion and his ability to speak wisely and persuasively. But a man of knowledge must also be wealthy because they see both as closely associated. Knowledge, they argue, brings wealth and increases it. But they also accept that wealth does not mean knowledge. They cite several examples of foolish men who inherited great wealth and lost it within a generation.

Wealth is defined in terms of the cash one has accumulated, and the number of wives, children, houses, livestock, yams and property one has acquired. But a man who has wealth and knowledge is only a potential leader. His leadership has to be activated by title-taking, which transforms latent leadership into active leadership.

In Nri, leadership operates at four levels, the age-grade, the lineage, the state and women's associations.

### Leadership at the Age-Grade Level

Nri age-grade system is fully discussed in Chapter 7. Here I shall only deal with leadership within each grade. Leadership is firstly determined by



Plate 20 Some members of the *irunabo* executive age grade, 1967.

age when the group is formed; the oldest person becomes the leader. The leadership criterion then changes. The first person to be married and have a child and so perform the ritual called *ima chi*, which entitles him to take further higher titles, becomes the leader. Finally, the first to take the *ozo* title and give the feast of the head of the age-grade to his age-grade becomes the leader called *isi ogbo*, until death or until he is stripped of his *ozo* title for committing a serious crime.

Of the nineteen age-grades extant in 1967 (see Table 42) two had retired – Olingba and Ekwueme – and were exempt from activities such as payment of levies; the other seventeen were still active. Of these, two age-grades had combined and emerged as the executive of the active age-grades. This was the Irunabo age-grade (Plate 20). Its duty was to mobilize all the other age-grades when called upon to do so by any of the two state councils. This age-grade directs the communication of actions emanating from the state councils to all other age-grades below and above them. They do not use force; they only organize and report to the state councils. They have other specific functions such as collecting the stipulated fines imposed on parents whose unmarried daughters are pregnant, dealing with all matters connected with the violation of the codes of behaviour and taboo connected with ritual masquerades, collecting all public contributions levied by the state councils and

(now) by the Nri Progress Union, and mobilizing the age-grades for communal and community development activities.

Only an age-grade with strong leadership can emerge as the executive age-grade. They are never appointed. The group as a unit has to achieve pre-eminence by proving, over a long period of time, that its members are exceptionally responsible and reliable. They remain in office until they begin to show signs of weak leadership and then hand over to the next emerging executive age-grade.

#### *Leadership at Lineage Levels*

Leadership within each level of lineage is determined in the first instance by age; the oldest man is the leader. Such a man is called *Ikenye okolobia* since he has no *ozo* title, though generally he has taken the next title, *nlinwamadu*. If the custodian of the founding temple and *ofo* is someone other than the oldest man, the oldest man will still be the leader in secular matters, but when it comes to the rituals connected with the temple the custodian of the temple will receive the ritual gift or tribute whatever his age.

The first person to take the *ozo* title in the lineage automatically becomes the leader and is called *isi nze*, whatever his age.<sup>2</sup> Such a person is not only leader in secular but also ritual matters, for he is also the first priest of most of the *Alusi* of



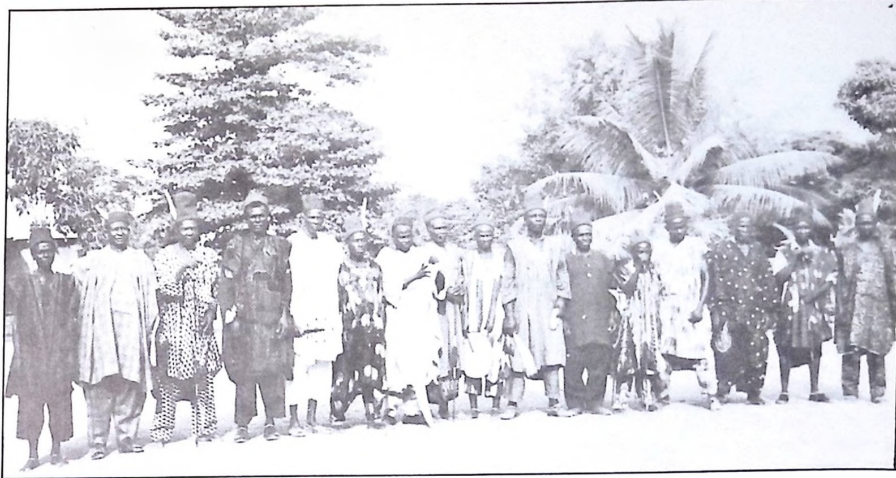


Plate 21 Some members of the Nzemabua state council, after a meeting at the Eze Nri's palace (in background).

the lineage. Even if he is not the custodian of the founding temple and *ofo*, he is still considered the first priest of the temple and will be expected to perform the rituals, though he must leave the ritual gifts for the custodian of the temple. The *isi nze* of the lineage is also the head of the lineage council which comprises all other *ozo* men, if any; all the non-*ozo* elders, *ikenye okolobia*; and all the other younger men, *umu okolobia*. During a discussion on plans only the *ozo* men will make the decision and the *isi nze* announces it. If there are no *ozo* men the *ikenye okolobia* will make the decision and the head of the *ikenye okolobia* will make the announcement. The age-grades of the lineage will then execute the decision in so far as it falls within their competence.

As the component lineages of the genealogy are ranked hierarchically, so also is its leadership. The leadership of a minimal lineage is made up of all the *ozo* men headed by the *isi nze* of the minimal lineage. That of the minor lineage is also made up of all the *ozo* men of its component minimal lineages, headed by the first among them to take the *ozo* title, and so on to the maximal lineage. Similarly the authority in the lineages is hierarchical. Theoretically the minimal is less powerful than the minor and the minor less than the major and the major less than the maximal.

### *The State Leadership*

To be a member of the *ndinze* council one must be an *ozo* person and one's position in the hierarchy depends on when one took the *ozo* title. The first to take the *ozo* title in this group is regarded as the leader, *isi ndi nze*, of the group. He is assisted by the person next in the hierarchy.

The *Nzemabua* council is also composed of the first four men to take the *ozo* title, drawn from certain maximal, major and minimal lineages listed in Table 41, (Plate 21). The leader of this group, also, is the first amongst them to take the *ozo* title, and is called *isi nzemabua*. The man who is the *isi nzemabua* is also the *isi ndi nze*, although he plays different roles in the two councils.

The ultimate head is the *Eze Nri*, who is regarded as the king of Nri.

### *Leadership in Women's Groups and Associations*

Women have their own titles, although fewer in number. A successful Nri woman is one who has taken all the women's titles, is married and has children. As an elderly wife in her husband's lineage, she can be a leader in the married women group called *inyom*. As a daughter in her father's patrilineage she can be a leader of the daughters-of-the-lineage group called *Umokpu*. She may be appointed a member of the *ilimmadunato* association, which is fully discussed in Chapter 7. (See Plate 22).



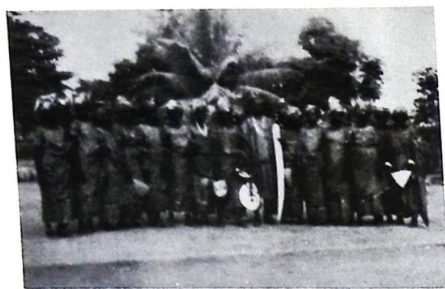


Plate 22 Some of the members of the Ilimmadunato women's association.

The headship of the *inyom* group is determined firstly by the order in which women are married into the lineage and then by the order of taking the various titles culminating in the title of *nne mmanwu*. The *nne mmanwu* is equivalent to the title *ima mmanwu* that male children take at the age of nine. Elderly married women of exemplary character and achievement are allowed to take this title in which the secret of the ritual mask is revealed to them. It is the greatest honour a lineage can give to a woman and so involves much feasting. It gives the woman some of the privileges of a male citizen of the lineage.

### Conclusion

It is clear that in the field of political action, leadership with respect to men is structured not so much by age as by achievement, epitomized by title-taking. Although titles are taken in stages arranged hierarchically, five titles are essential and crucial in the political field. These are *Ima mmanwu*, *Ozo ichi*, *Ili nwammadu*, *Ozo* and *Nri*. I will briefly describe the essential elements of these titles and how they determine the political role of the individual and of the group.

### Political Titles

#### *Ima Mmanwu* (title)

By the age of nine a *Nri* boy has taken about six or seven titles which are directed towards transforming him into a social and ritual personality. At about nine he takes the sixth or seventh title, but this title has special significance because for the first time the child is brought indirectly into the area of political action. This title is *Ima mmanwu*, that is, knowing the secret of the ritual mask. The

procedure is briefly as follows:<sup>3</sup> (See Table 31, Chapter 6).

#### 1st stage: The payment

The father pays the fee, ranging from 5/- to £1 as charges differ from lineage to lineage, and gives four gallons of palm wine to members of his minimal lineage who have taken the title.

#### 2nd stage: The revelation

The child is taken to a *mmanwu* club house. The mask comes in dancing and singing and uncovering his 'hands', his 'feet' and, finally, his 'face' and 'head'. The child recognizes the masked dancer as his relation. He is next shown the whole paraphernalia of the mask.

#### 3rd stage: The admonition

The child is warned of the grave consequences of revealing or talking to any female about the secret. He is reminded that he is a man and the secret is known only to initiated men and a few elderly women.<sup>4</sup> The revealing of the secret of the mask is called *itikpo isi mmanwu* (literally, breaking the skull of the mask). It is a major abomination to break this taboo.

After this ceremony the child is regarded as a member of the *mmanwu* group and can take shares from payments made by new members from the next day. He can put on the mask and while wearing it he exercises some freedom of speech. He can address the public during shows and call people names reflecting their anti-social behaviour. In Chapter 7, I describe the types of masks and show that as the child grows he joins the type appropriate to his age. This title has brought the little boy indirectly into public life.

#### *Ozo Ichi* title

Immediately after *ima mmanwu*, at about the age of ten, the child takes the seventh or eighth title called *igbu ichi* or *ozo ichi*. In the past, in taking this title the child was subjected to the ordeal of having his face marked with elaborate parallel marks made with a knife. These marks are similar to the type found on the Igbo-ukwu bronze objects (Plate 23).<sup>5</sup> A very brief account of the major procedure will help to bring out the political significance of this title. *Ichi* title-taking commences in the eighth month and ends in the ninth month of the *Nri* traditional calendar and the procedure



Plate 23 A bronze object from Igbo-ukwu, showing facial ichi marks. This style is still found at Ebenebe and Umana, areas under Nri influence.

(With permission of Professor Thurstan Shaw)

narrated to me by those who have the marks on their faces is as follows.<sup>6</sup>

### 1st stage: The payment

Payment varies; at Akamkpisi it was £7; at Agukwu it involved giving a feast to members of one's lineage who were holders of the title. A specialist facial artist from Umu Dioka lineage of Neni, a neighbouring town, was called in to perform the task and was paid.

### 2nd stage: Exorcism

The marking of the face is a risky operation, so

two ritual sacrifices are made. The first is that of 'tying the bad spirits', called *ifie ekwensu*, to stop them from coming to create havoc. The other is called *ino obo*, in which a hole is made in the ground and ritual food buried – a symbolic way of burying the evil spirits.

### 3rd stage: The ordeal

The child is laid on his back and his head placed on a plank laid across a small pit. He is held firmly by the head while the marks are made. He must try not to cry. Hot water is dropped on the marks, charcoal from the bottom of a pot is rubbed in and



Plate 24.  
Ichi marks on wall.  
Ichi marks painted on the  
wall of an Alusi temple  
in Nri.  
(photo: Odinani Museum)



the face is wrapped with leaves called *otubolo*. The child is then removed to his mother's house.

#### 4th stage: The seclusion

The child is kept in seclusion for the traditional twelve days and carefully nursed. If he dies during this period it is an abomination. The house is purified. At the end of the period the 'daughters-of-the-lineage' called *umu-okpu* keep a vigil, dancing and singing '*Nwa ichi nyem agwuabgunem, Ichi Eze Nwa di Okpala*', meaning 'Ichi boy give me food that I may not die of hunger. The *ichi* that belong to the first son of Eze.' In the morning the women are fed with pounded yam.

#### 5th stage: Integration

The child goes to his lineage's *Alusi* to perform the ritual of 'breaking-the-egg' called *itu anwu*. He breaks the egg, and after twenty-one days his parents give a feast to his lineage; after thirty days his body is decorated with patterns using paints made from the juice of *uli* seeds. He is finely dressed, in the presence of all who have taken the title, and then goes to the market where he is greeted and given gifts by the people. Eze Nri sends his greetings too.

#### 6th stage: Admonition

The child is told by the *isi nze* of his lineage that henceforth he must begin to observe taboos. He is now like the first son of Eze Nri, *nwa okpala nri*. He can now carry the spear of peace called *otonsi*, and can validly perform the ritual of purification, abrogation and enactment of taboos under the supervision of his elders, as authorized by Eze Nri.

The ownership of this title is mythically attributed to Eze Nri, as stated in the mythology of the origin of yam. This is the ritual basis of this title. The first son and daughter of any Eze Nri born after his coronation are marked with *ichi* marks seven days after their birth. The male and female dwarfs in Eze's palace are also marked. Similarly all sons of Nri men are marked with *ichi*. This mark is the mark of royalty that may be executed on wood, pottery and on walls (Plates 24 and 25).

The *ichi* title confers on the child the rights of a full male citizen of the state and the right to become an emissary of Eze Nri. By beginning to keep the taboos he has begun to obey the supreme authority of his state, and has taken the second

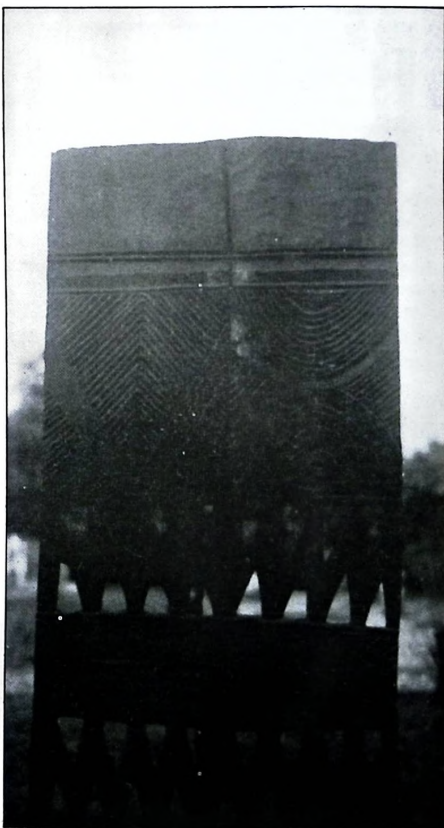
major step towards becoming a political figure. He accompanies his father or relations to other settlements. As a trainee he carries for his master or father the *ofo* staff and the *otonsi* staff. He is taught the code of conduct used outside Nri, including the elements of the secret 'language'. As he grows older and becomes knowledgeable in Nri rituals he is made an agent of Eze Nri, and thus earns his living both as an agent and a 'ritualist'.

With the advent of Europeans the making of this mark was stopped. But the title of *ichi* is still

Plate 25

*Ichi marks on wood.*

*Ichi marks have been carved on this wooden panel, which is used in connection with the title of Ntufuazu. (photo: Odianani Museum)*





taken for Nri children by parents making the payment and touching the knife on the child's forehead symbolically. The last age-grade that has *ichi* marks on their faces is Nribuenyi, those born between 1906 and 1908. But a few persons in Okpatu (1912–1914) and Ifediora (1915–1917) have *ichi* marks on their faces.

#### Nli Nwammadu title

After the *ichi* title, five or six more titles are taken which further elevate the social status of a person. If a man marries then immediately he has his first child he performs the *ima chi*. After marriage, a man is allowed to continue title-taking up to the stage of *nli Nwammadu*. He is not allowed to proceed further if he is not married. Marriage is not a title, but it is a social status that has to be fulfilled before one is allowed to rise further. (See Chapter 6, Table 31, on types of title). The next in the series that brings one into the limelight of public affairs is the title of *nli nwammadu*. The procedure is simple.<sup>8</sup>

##### 1st stage: Payment

The man tells the *isi nze* of his *ozo* alliance group (called *ogwe mmuo*) of his intentions. The *isi nze* calls together the *ozo* alliance group. The man brings four gallons of palm wine and four of raffia wine and £20 or £40 (about ₦40 or ₦80) according to the payments stipulated by the group. The money is shared by former members, and he can begin to take shares from the next day.

##### 2nd stage: Installation

The *isi nze* will announce the new name of the person. Since *ozo* men must have four title names, the name announced must be one of the four names the person will use while and after taking the *ozo* title. The three paraphernalia associated with this title will be handed to him: the bag made from the skin of an aborted calf, *akpa nwaefi*, the skin of a ram, *akpukpo ebunu*, and a short spear-like staff with a round head, called *alo okpulukpu*.

##### 3rd stage: Admonition

He is advised by the *isi nze* to behave responsibly so that in the near future he can take the *ozo* title.<sup>9</sup>

The person has now reached the point where he may begin to arrange to take the *ozo* title. He has the right to hold the *alo okpulukpu* staff while talking in the Eze's palace when the Eze calls the

*okolobia* group into action. This *alo* staff symbolizes the new political power he is aspiring to assume.

#### Ozo title

In the past it was taboo for a man to take the *ozo* title while his father was alive. It was argued that this helped reduce leadership conflict within the extended family. In about 1927, just before Eze Nri Obalike died, he was persuaded by his council to abrogate the taboo – he refused. In about 1932 the council did so and for the first time Nri men took the *ozo* title during their father's lifetime. Similarly junior brothers do not like taking the title before their elder brothers because it alters the authority structure based on seniority. But some do, and this generates an almost perpetual state of strife within the extended family because the structure of leadership has changed.

To take the *ozo* title is an elaborate affair. Here I shall only summarize the significant stages, which I witnessed when the *ozo* title was taken by five men between 1967 and 1972.<sup>10</sup>

##### 1st stage: *Ofo Ozo*

The man tells the *isi nze* of his lineage, who calls a meeting of the *ozo* group to which the lineage belongs. He gives them a small feast of four gallons of palm wine and four gallons of raffia wine and 8 kola nuts. He pays them £60. He has carried out the *ofo ozo*, which means that from the next day he can begin to take his share of payments.

##### 2nd stage: *Obu nisi* Payment

The man again calls together the *ozo* group of his lineage and gives them eight gallons of palm wine and eight of raffia wine. He pays £100 to the *ogwe mmuo* group. On the next day he gives all the *ozo* men cooked food and four gallons of palm wine and four gallons of raffia wine. The money is shared. (Tables 15 and 16 illustrate how the sharing is done). On the next day he gives a goat, one hen and one cock to all *ozo* men; this is called *nri afu onu*.

##### 3rd stage: *Igba Okpete* – Washing of hands

The water of the sugar cane is put in a bowl in the temple of the man taking the title. Each woman whose husband has taken the *ozo* title in the *ozo* group of the person taking the title is given 3d. All *ozo* men of Agukwu are given 2d each and the *isi*

*nze* Agukwu is given 3d. Each *ozo* man comes into the temple and dips his finger in the sugar cane bowl, and his 2d or 3d is given to him. The person taking the title can eat anywhere without fear of pollution.

#### 4th stage: *Ula Mmuo* – The vigil for spirits

On the appointed day the aspirant feasts all *nze* men, his age-grade, all *okolobia*, the *umu-okpu*, his mother's patrilineage and his in-laws and friends. They dance throughout the night and gifts are exchanged as stipulated by tradition.

On this night, the *isi nze* hands two paraphernalia to the aspirant: the double-headed spear staff called *alo-ozo* and a small elephant tusk called *mkpalo*. His three remaining names are announced by *isi nze*, one having been taken when he obtained the title of *nlinwammadu*. He now has four new names. From that night it is regarded unusual to call him by his former name, which was given to him by his parents.

#### 5th stage: *Ikpata Ofo* – Getting the *Ofo*

In the morning that ends the vigil the aspirant, accompanied by his flautist, goes to the *isi nze* of the keeper and giver of the *ofo* staff of his ward. He pays one hen, eight yams and two shillings. The *isi nze* consecrates the *ofo*, sacrifices a hen, kola nut and wine, counts to nine and places the *ofo* in the man's hand, saying: 'Our ancestors say go, be old, look after our people with justice and truth'. The aspirant remains silent; he takes the *ofo*, walks away without talking to anyone or looking backwards and goes to his temple and places the *ofo* on the altar.

#### 6th stage: Ritual of installation

This ritual is made up of three parts.

##### a. *Ido Mmuo* – The making of the altar

On the morning of *Eke* (one of the four market days) the *isi nze* ties a ritual bundle of sticks called *ife egbo* to shield all persons against misfortune and accidents. By afternoon, the people have gathered and the ritual of installation begins. The aspirant sits in front of his temple on the ceremonial wooden stool, *oche mmuo*. The *isi nze* comes and plants four ritual trees of *ogilisi* in the ground. Each stick represents the four market days, *Eke*, *Oye*, *Afo* and *Nkwo*. Sacrifice is offered. The aspirant has become a potential great ancestor owning a big temple.

##### b. *Ichi Ozo* – The title

The man sits on his chair in front of the temple, his body decorated with white chalk. The *isi nze* ties the person's ankle with cord, gives him an *ofo* and *nguagiliga*, a staff of honour which is a long iron lance decorated with rings, and a red cap is placed on his head. He wrestles with his wife and is knocked down. The *isi nze* then announces his four *ozo* names publicly.

##### c. *Isa Ile* – The cleaning of the tongue (Admonition)

The taboos that are observed by *ozo* men are recited to him by the *isi nze*. The tongue of the man is consecrated, *mmacha*, by the *isi nze* thus: the *ozo* man puts his tongue out and the *isi nze* takes some leaves of *ukpa* tree, dips them in *ngwo* solution and rubs them on the man's tongue four times. He does the same with the leaves of a kola nut tree. A hen is also brought and the beak rubbed four times on his tongue. While performing each of these actions the *isi nze* says: 'You are now *nze*. Beware of evil and dirty deeds. Beware of lies. Never tell lies. Beware of injustice. Never be unjust. Bring peace and prosperity to your people.' The hen's mouth is torn open and the blood dripped on the man's tongue and on the ground. The hen is cooked and all *nze* men eat it.<sup>11</sup>

##### 7th stage: *Izu Afia* – Going to market

The *ozo* man goes to the market on the following *Eke* amidst drumming and singing. He greets the *Eze Nri* and gives him tribute.

##### 8th stage: Seclusion

The person is secluded in his home for twenty-one days.

##### 9th stage: Last ritual

During the seventh traditional month in the *Nri* calendar, the person makes his *Ebo*, which is a special ritual altar in front of his compound and which shows that the compound is that of an *ozo* man. He goes to the *Ebo* belonging to his ward and confesses his past evils, and then to the *Ajana* shrine to be cleansed. Finally, he pays £2 2s to the whole of *Nri* for recognizing his four names and £10.0s to the *Nri* Progress Union. The Union gives him a certificate signed by the president and secretary, and signed and sealed by the *Eze Nri*. His name is officially registered as an *ozo* man in *Nri* town.

To sum up, the title confers four major statuses and roles on the holder:

#### *Ritual*

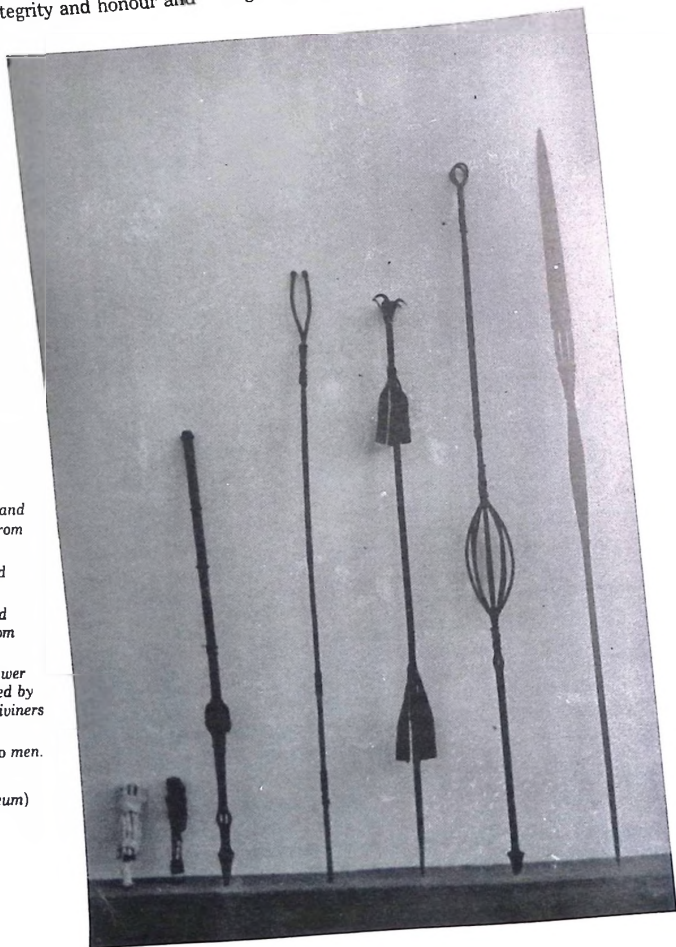
The person can now own the temple of *ichie ukwu*, the spirits of the great ancestors. He is considered a living ancestor and may be referred to as *ichie ukwu*. He has to observe some specific *taboos* (enumerated in Chapter 3, Table 5). He can be a priest of the lineage temples and those of the *Alusi* when it is his turn. He must attend the *onu ebo* ritual annually to swear to his integrity and honour and

confess his social crimes before the *ozo* men, otherwise his integrity, honour and 'purity' will be in doubt and he cannot attend the Eze's palace. He can be made an *ichie ukwu* after his death if he has fulfilled certain conditions. If he dies he can be given the burial for *ozo* men.

#### *Economic*

He is a shareholder in his *ozo* alliance group. He can negotiate the buying and selling of *ofo* staff certificates in his *ozo* group. His economic security is regarded as high.

Plate 26 (left to right)  
*ofo mfioko*, nine *ofo* tied  
 together.  
*ofo-ozo*, staff of political and  
 ritual authority derived from  
 the ancestors.  
*otonsi*, staff of peace and  
 immunity.  
*alo*, staff of political and  
 ritual power derived from  
 Chukwu.  
*oji*, staff of mystical power  
 derived from Agwu used by  
 tradition by doctors, diviners  
 and medicine men.  
*nguagiliga*, staff of *ozo* men.  
 another *alo* staff.  
 (photo: Odinani Museum)





### Social

He has the right to own, keep and use all *ozo* paraphernalia – the red cap, the white ankle threads, the double-headed spear, *alo*, the single-headed iron lance, *nguagiliga*, the *ofo-ozo*, the *ozo* bronze bell, the elephant tusk, *okike*. He can be called by any of his four names. He can have the shrine of *Agbala*, *Anyanwu* and *Ebo*. (Plate 26).

### Political

He becomes a member of the traditional ruling group. Thus he becomes a member of *Ndinze*, one of the state councils, and he is regarded as a man of upright character and integrity. He can be an adjudicator in the Eze Nri court, participating in decision-taking, *igba ume* or *ipu izu*. He can be appointed a member of the *Nzemabua* state council. He can be the head, *isi nze*, of his lineage, and of his ward and of Nri. (See Plate 27).

The *ozo* man is a significant political personality both at the lineage and state level. His installation is centred on his ability to speak the truth and maintain justice and peace amongst his people. He achieves this position by working hard for it. He holds the *alo* of his lineage, which symbolizes the power *ike* that comes from Chukwu through Eze Nri. Chukwu as creator of his lineage is symbolized in the *mkpa alo* or *okike* (the short elephant tusk) that was handed over to him with the *alo* on the day of his installation. He was later given the *ofo* of the ancestor, also derived from Nri Menri through Eze Nri. The *ofo* legitimized the use of power. Thus, power to act on people, in Nri thinking, is of divine origin while authority to use power is of social origin. He remains an *ozo* while alive, but if he were to commit a grievous offence, the Eze Nri and his council could take away the *ozo* title.

### The Sacred Eze Nri

The king of the state in Nri is the Eze Nri. In 1910, N. Thomas, who had the opportunity to see the Eze Nri Obalike, had this to say: 'The Ezenri, or King of Nri, a town otherwise known as Aguku, is a somewhat striking figure. In his own house, or in the town of Aguku, a large single bell is used and when the Eze Nri strikes this all the people present clap their hands. He is the spiritual potentate over a large extent of the Ibo country and so great is the awe which he inspires that recently, when, probably for the first time in

history, an Eze Nri entered the native court of Awka while a sitting was going on, the whole assembly rose and prepared to flee.'<sup>12</sup> This record is an accurate summary of what Eze Nri stands for in the eyes of his own people and many other Igbo peoples.

Earlier I pointed out that he is not called *isi* or *onyi isi*. He is called *Eze Mmuo* or *Eze Alusi*, meaning the king of spirits or the king of the spiritual forces and beings. He is greeted as *Igwe*, meaning symbolically the sky, and he greets the people as *ora*, meaning my people. When he sounds his small iron gong, the people reply by clapping their hands.

What do all these symbolic words and actions mean in political terms? Nri people believe that Eri derived his divinity from *Chukwu*, the Creator, and all Eze Nri are believed to derive their sacred and mystical powers from Eri. This sacredness and mystical power has passed down from generation to generation patrilineally to the present Eze Nri, who holds the original *ofo* and *alo* of both Agukwu and Diodo kingship.

In Chapter 6 I discuss how kingship rotates at two levels within the maximal lineages of Agukwu and within the major lineages of the maximal lineages. After the death of an Eze Nri an interregnum of a minimum of seven years and a maximum of twenty or more years is allowed to lapse before a new Eze is crowned. During the interregnum the senior son of the Eze Nri or the *isi nze* of the Eze's lineage officiates. The palace of the deceased Eze continues to be the centre of political, social, economic and cultural activities.

A period of interregnum is clearly described by an Assistant District Officer, D.C. Tovey, in 1929 when he visited Nri.<sup>13</sup> He wrote: 'Obalike of Uruoji, the last Eze Nri, died in 1927. The former Eze Nri had been Enwelianni of Obuagu. When Enwelianni died his son Asiagbu took charge, his powers being renewed every seven years for over twenty years. On Asiagbu's death, the senior title member in Aguku, Okeke Naka, took his place and on Okeke Naka's death Ewuocha Obu, his successor as senior title member, took over and remained in charge until Obalike was made Eze Nri.' He also added: 'Obalike's son Oko Nwazenri would have taken charge on his father's death... Oko was asked to pay £1 to cover the loss and refused. The elders then decided unanimously that the senior title member should succeed Obalike as head of



the town instead of Oko.' A period of interregnum in Nri is, therefore, a period of great activity centred around the selection of the person to officiate during the interregnum on the one hand and, on the other hand, around the major issue of finding a suitable candidate for the throne.

In validating one's claim to legitimacy in respect of becoming Eze Nri, seven conditions must be fulfilled: namely, that the rotational principles are followed, that the person is not the first-born son (*okpala*), that the person has taken all the titles of Nri, that his father has died, that he has divine inspiration, that he has performed the elaborate ritual coronation physically or symbolically, and that the *ofo* and *alo* of Nri kingship are transferred to him and he holds them physically.

#### The Ritual Selection of Eze Nri

The major lineage whose turn it is to produce a candidate for Eze Nri does not do so by election or appointment. It is believed that the candidate is ritually inspired. The statement that Eze Nri is

not selected may be regarded as a ritual statement. It is believed that the candidate will begin to see signs. He proclaims that the former Eze Nri appears to him in a dream and has ordered him to be Eze Nri. Then the people will begin to watch out for signs. The walls of his compound will begin to collapse in the dry season; his children and livestock may begin to die if he continues to delay. He can predict the future. He can make rain or prevent it. He can cause plagues of locusts, yam beetles, swarms of flies, birds, soldier ants and snakes, and he can also stop them and generate fertility of plants and animals.

The acquiring of mystical powers and the manifestation of these are sure indications that the individual concerned has been elected to succeed by the spirit of the past Eze Nri, *Nri Menri*. But this has to be confirmed by divination, *afa*. The *Ndi nze* with the *Nzemabua* council will approach three different diviners who will divine at the front of the temple of an *Alusi* to ensure that they will speak the truth, and in the presence of

Plate 27 Ndi Nze members are given special seats during the ceremony of Igu Aro in Eze Nri's palace. Some have their elephant tusk with them.



the public. The diviners after long divining may or may not be able to reach a unanimous conclusion; if not they are dismissed and the interregnum continues until unanimity is reached. Then the *Nzemabua* informs the candidate to go ahead with his coronation ceremony. However, the diviners may reach a unanimous conclusion but the *Nzemabua* council disagree. In this case a stalemate exists until such time as agreement is reached.

It is clear that the candidates for the throne are not just sitting waiting for the supernaturals to appoint them; they know that the voice of the people is the voice of the supernaturals. They are actively engaged in feeling their way silently but surely through the intricate corridors of Nri power politics as represented by the electors – the diviners, the *Ndi nze*, the *Nzemabua* and the public.

#### The Coronation

Once the selection of the new successor is accepted, he begins the long coronation ceremony. I shall state briefly what the present Eze Nri and two of those who were deeply involved in his coronation told me.<sup>11</sup>

##### 1st stage: The Visitation

The incumbent visited all the temples of the past Eze Nri located in the various royal lineages of Nri and all the *Alusi* in Nri in their order of seniority. To each *Alusi* he sacrificed a goat, a hen and a cock. He then went to the Umu Diana lineage to inform them and make the necessary payments of a she-goat, eight yams and a pot of palm wine. A sacrifice was offered at the collective temple of Ezikanebo, founder of the Umu Diana lineage. He also visited all the *Alusi* in Umu Diana and offered a cock or hen and wine to each. He was given a small Umu Diana boy to carry his wooden bowl of white chalk, *nzuzi*, during his journey to other Igbo towns.

##### 2nd stage: The Journey to Aguleri

Accompanied by musicians, representatives of Nri lineages and his wives, he travelled through the towns of Enugu-uku, Enugu Agidi, Amanuke, Achalla, Nando and Igboariam to Aguleri, staying a night in each town, visiting the town's *Alusi* and receiving gifts. He stayed four days at Aguleri in *Obu Uga* to receive the blessing of Eri and to

collect a lump of clay brought from the bottom of the Anambra river by divers. This lump of clay would be used for making the ritual pot, *odudu*, for the shrine of *Nri Menri*. He left Aguleri and travelled through Umuleri, Nsugbe, Nteje, Awkuzu, Ukpo, Abagana, Nimo, Abacha, Nnobi, Oraukwu, Nneokwa, Adazi, Agulu, Nibo and Nise and then back to Nri. In these towns he also visited the principal *Alusi*, received gifts and demonstrated his great mystic powers.

##### 3rd stage: The Period of Seclusion

He remained secluded for a year in a place called Abananwara in a hut made of leaves. He lived there with his first wife and the small Adama boy from Umu Diana lineage. *Ufia* music would sound day and night.

##### 4th stage: The Coronation

He moved to his new palace and sat on the mud throne, covered with leopard skin. He was clad in white cloth. The *isi nze* of Umu Diana lineage placed the crown, made of hide, *okpu eze*, and encircled with eight *ugo* feathers, on his head. Copper or bronze anklets, *mgba ukwa ona*, were put on both his ankles and a carnelian bead, *aka*, was tied on his right wrist. The *isi nze* of Umu Diana brought the *ofo-Nri* and *alo-Nri-Menri* from the palace of his predecessor and handed them to him. The Adama enumerated all the taboos the new Eze must observe and those that people would observe on his behalf. He ended by saying: 'Rule your people well, *chi ofuma*, so that peace (*udo*), health (*ezi ndu*), prosperity (*eku*), wisdom (*amamife*), truth (*ezi oku*), justice (*ikpe kwu oto*), may prevail in your town and in your kingdom *mgbangba ora*. The *isi nze* made the shrine of *Nri Menri* in front of the palace by burying the sacred pot made from the mud from Aguleri and the bronze or copper objects and wooden objects made by smiths and carvers employed by the candidate.

##### 5th stage: Ritual of Desecration and Rebellion

The Eze first 'fought' with his wife, who knocked him down, and then he knocked her down. He, armed with sword and shield, 'fought' a young man *okolobia*, who pushed the Eze back and the Eze finally pushed him out of the palace. The same act was done with a titled man, *onye nze*. The weapons were destroyed and buried.

6th stage: The Transformation - Death and Resurrection

The Eze was buried in a shallow grave. His wives began to perform the real mortuary rites, which lasted for twenty-one days. He 'rose' from the 'dead' clothed with white cloth and decorated with white chalk *nzu*. He had become a spirit *Mmuo*) and a living *Alusi*. He announced his new name and the people greeted him as *Igwé*, the sky, the most high. He had become Eze Nri.

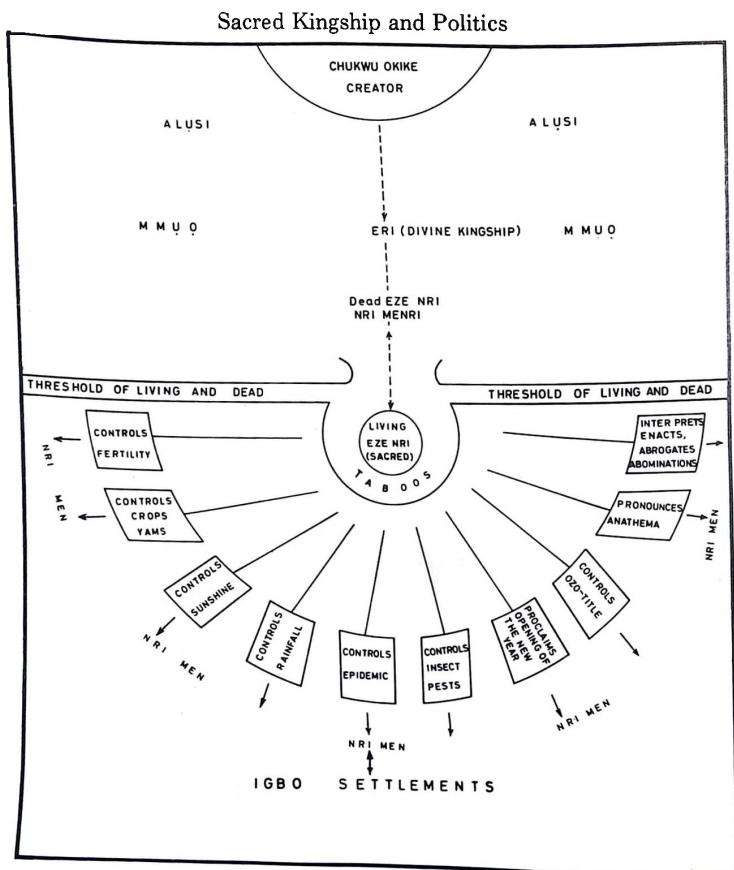
7th stage: Integration

A wrestling match was held and *ufia* music was

played for one year in his palace. Other towns came to bring tribute and pay him homage.

The Eze's palace becomes the centre of the community activities. He transmits his mystical power to his people and can make and rescind the rules of taboo, remove abominations and control the *ozo* title and *Alusi* in and outside Nri.<sup>15</sup> The ten mystical powers attributed to Eze Nri and the Eze's relationships with the supernaturals and the living are summed up in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Relationship between Eze Nri, the supernatural beings, and human beings. Eze Nri exists on the threshold of the living and the dead. He is hemmed round by taboos.





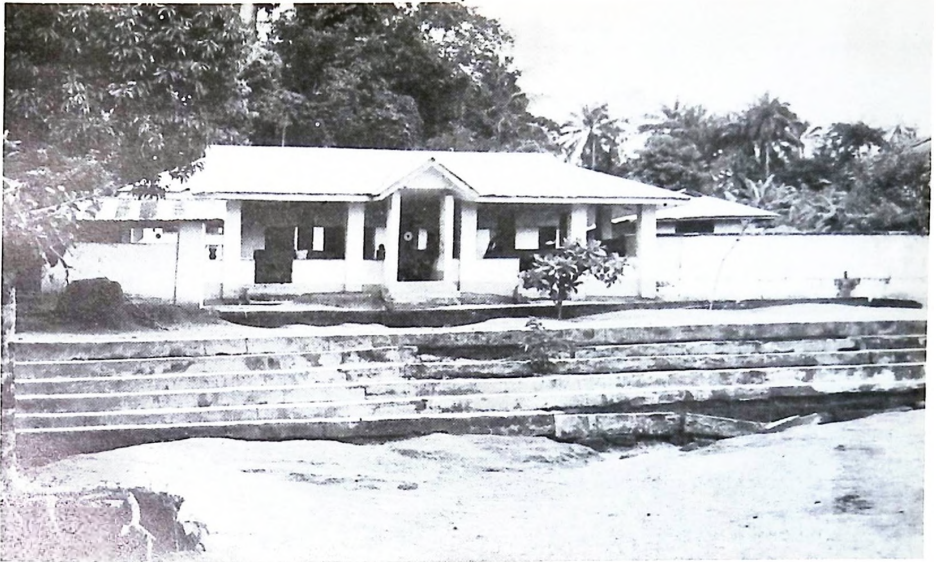


Plate 28 Eze Nri's palace. The reception hall of the current Eze Nri's palace is built with modern materials.

### The Palace Organization of Eze Nri

The palaces of the past and present Eze Nri are similar in structure. The present Eze Nri's palace occupies a rectangular area of about 200 x 250 yards (Plate 28). His personal quarters are built in a portion of the rectangular area and are fenced off. In front of this fenced portion is his big reception hall; on the other side is his personal temple, and in the front of the reception hall is the temple of the spirits of the past Eze Nri, *Nri Menri*. Inside the hall there is a raised platform where he sits or reclines during the day. At the other end of the hall are long benches where anyone may sit.

The palace is manned by the palace officials, *Odibo Eze*, who are of four types, some selected members of the Umu Diana lineages, the male and female dwarfs of Eze Nri, the Eze's palace priest and the Eze's musicians.

### The Umu Diana Lineage Personnel

Some of the most important palace officers of Eze Nri are persons selected from Umu Diana lineages. They vary in number from five to ten. Some of

them are young boys who always remain naked. They carry the gong of Eze Nri and cook for him. They are 'virgin' boys, the king's pages. They grow up in the palace and once they reach the age of having interest in girls they are paid off and leave the service of the palace.

The adult officials of Umu Diana lineages do not live in the palace. They live in their village which is part of Nri, about two miles from the present palace. But they attend the palace often, especially during ceremonials. They are the personal advisers of Eze Nri in matters of palace protocol and behaviour in public. They are also in charge of the inner-chamber of the palace where the sacred royal objects are kept. They have the final say in what is taboo and what is not taboo with regard to Eze Nri. They introduce visitors to Eze Nri and they handle his paraphernalia. The Eze speaks to the audience through one of them. They alone can touch the Eze and his regalia, and they alone can perform the coronation and burial of the Eze. (Plate 29). They are rewarded as stipulated by custom and according to the wish of Eze Nri. There are two types of rewards, collective and individual. The collective rewards are the ones Eze Nri gives to the Umu Diana lineages as a whole and are traditionally defined, and the



individual rewards are the ones given to individuals. The Eze Nri could refuse to accept an Adama, as members of the Umu Diana lineages are sometimes called. He could also dismiss any. In this case the individual could attend the palace not as an individual to serve the king, but as a member of the Adama lineage.

#### The Dwarfs of the Palace

Nri religion prohibits the killing of human beings and regards it as the greatest abomination against the mystical force of the earth. Twins were not regarded as human beings and it was permitted to kill them, as it was abomination to bear them.

Plate 29 Eze Nri, Nriijimofo II, 1937–present. The Eze Nri is flanked by members of Umu Diana lineage during a ceremony. Beside the iron gong is his son, Prince Ruben Tabansi, who may rule during his father's interregnum.

Dwarfs born in parts of Igbo land under Nri influence were regarded as mystical beings, and were sent to Eze Nri through Nri men in the various Igbo settlements. Most of these dwarfs grew up in the palace of Eze Nri or in the homes of Nri men. They were believed to be adept traditional doctors, and were important members of Eze Nri's palace. They were symbols of Eze Nri's power and he used them as instruments of communication. If a male dwarf, *Aka Nri*, or a female dwarf, *Ada Nri*, knocked at one's door and said 'Eze wants you', the person obeyed without delay. In the past if Eze Nri wanted to summon leaders of other towns or wanted to settle a dispute, he sent Nri men accompanied by one of his palace dwarfs. The presence of a Nri dwarf in an Igbo village was a matter of great concern and anxiety.





Plate 30 Rare photograph of Eze Nri Jimofo II and the woman dwarf who died in 1970. She had ichi marks on her face.

Plate 31 Eze Nri's musicians, who are mostly ozo men.



The Eze Nri looked after the welfare of the dwarfs. The present Eze Nri had dwarfs, the last of whom died in 1970. (Plate 30).

#### The Palace Priest

After the coronation of Eze Nri, which involved his 'death' and 'resurrection', he is regarded as a spirit. He does not offer sacrifices because sacrifices are offered to spirits, which he is believed to be. All palace sacrifices are offered by his subjects to *Nri Menri*, the spirits of the past Eze Nri. He appoints a chief priest to be in charge of all rituals connected with the palace and the community. The priest is rewarded by taking the traditional parts of the animal offered, which would have been the Eze's share. The chief priest is generally a member of the Eze's minimal lineage and is an *ozo*-titled man. The Eze could replace him.

#### The Eze's Musicians

The Eze keeps a group of state musicians composed of drummers and flautists. In the past the wooden slit drum was played only in the temples of *Alusi* and palaces of authorized *Eze*. The wooden slit drum, which is a type of 'talking drum', is played during the night of any festival, when dancing, wrestling and acrobatics are held in front of the palace. The musicians are all members of the Eze's minimal lineage, except the slit drum players who are generally hired from Agulu, a neighbouring town. All the musicians are rewarded with gifts and stipulated money payment. (Plates 31 and 32).

#### The Character of the Palace Officials

Nri palace officials are not hierarchically ranked. They do not participate in politics, although as individuals they may have some influence in the palace politics. They are officials who help human beings to communicate with the king, who is considered a spirit and so is encircled by taboos.

#### Wealth, Prestige and Power in Nri

The concept of the 'Big Man' hinges on an assumed correlation between accumulation of wealth and power capability. This correlation is also crucial in the development of a class system in the Marxist sense of the word.<sup>16</sup> This correlation, as developed by Homans,<sup>17</sup> Blau,<sup>18</sup> Bailey<sup>19</sup> and Kapferer,<sup>20</sup> is based on the economic theory of exchange. Henderson<sup>21</sup> has also used this concept





Plate 32 Eze Nri's  
wooden slit drummer, ufi.  
He was generally hired  
from Agulu.

in analysing the evolution of relationship in Onitsha Igbo. According to this concept it is generally postulated that, given a number of groups and persons interacting in a given economic situation, and given a specific mode of resource distribution, a certain pattern of inequality may emerge. The economic inequality can be converted into power dominance at the political structural level.

There are several major weaknesses in this anthropological approach of the 'big man'. The central argument of most of the adherents is based on differential access to scarce resources. But they fail to clarify and pin-point the degree and nature of scarcity, and to discuss adequately the character and pattern of the distribution of the scarce resources. Above all, they ignore the system of channels through which resources flow into and out of the community; the volume of the resources, and the control system that directs the flow at the various check points in the system.

The adherents also assume that wealth is accumulated and expanded by certain successful individuals in a rational effort to protect and strengthen their positions within a given political and economic system. They ignore the irrational and symbolic forces in operation by emphasizing the relationship between macro-political power and authority structures of a system and minimizing the significance of the micro-political events which are an essential part of the system.

I shall demonstrate in the Nri case that the same economic big man who can be a strong focal point of power conflict in the system can also be the religious and symbolic big man who is the vital weak point in the power structure of the system. Thus in the Nri political system big men do exploit the position of big men, and small men exploit big men, neutralizing the development of a class system based on the notion of the oppressor versus the oppressed.

Both in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were several big men in Nri such as Odenigbo Alike Ifem, Asiegbo Enweliana, Okpoko, Onyeso Enweliana and Ewuocha Ogboo. Also between 1960 and 1972 there were several successful merchants in Nri who were considered big men, such as M.O. Mbolu, R.N. Tabansi, D.C. Nwosu (Njikoka), and D.O. Efezue. There are also other outstanding personalities such as Cannon J.E. Ikejiani. These big men did co-operate and compete among themselves as members of the same or different group. Their actions accelerated, retarded or frustrated decisions and they even attempted to dominate the groups of which they were members. They generated different types of political action between and among groups to further their interest. But not one of these men, (according to Nri oral tradition, or as far as I was able to observe) gained sufficient power in the system to challenge either the power of authority

of Eze Nri, or usurp or even seriously threaten the power or authority of other political groups in Nri. Why was this so?

The reason can be found in the built-in checks in the social structure of Nri and in the ideology of leadership discussed earlier in this chapter. Some of these checks also account for the absence in Nri tradition of any account of the abuse of power by past Eze Nri. Once an Eze Nri is crowned he cannot be deposed in spite of any misconduct (which is always idiomatically expressed as the misconduct of his *Nzemabua*). How these checks operate within the system is discussed elsewhere in this book. Here, for the purpose of clarity, I shall bring them together under four broad headings.

#### *Checks based on genealogical principles and ideology*

The Nri segmentary lineage principle is tied up with their belief in the ancestor cult. The lineages are highly differentiated horizontally and vertically in the genealogical structure in terms of role, demography and distribution of power and authority. Power and authority are, therefore, segmented. Hence different persons hold the *ofo* and *alo* staff at different points in the horizontal and vertical structure of the genealogy. Even though segmentary opposition is minimal, the ideology of political power is that a big man of a maximal lineage, X, cannot use the *ofo* and *alo* of his maximal lineage to control the maximal lineages of Y and Z. Such a man has to strive hard to be the holder of the combined *ofo* and *alo* of X, Y and Z maximal lineages, and accumulated wealth alone cannot help him. He has to live long enough to be the first *ozo* man of the three maximal lineages, which of course should be related genealogically.

In this system only the holder of the Nri title, that is the Eze Nri, has the paramount *ofo* and *alo*. Hence, he alone can challenge the power and authority of other maximal lineages whether or not they are related to his. A big man of a given maximal lineage may of course attempt to challenge the power and authority of other lineages but the chances are that he will fail hopelessly in the long run.

#### *Checks based on territorial organization*

The dual and tripartite division of the Nri is another effective check against the overall influence

of a big man. The territorial divisions of Agukwu, Diodo and Akamkpisi symbolize the autonomy of the component parts of the Nri federal system formed during the reign of Eze Nribuife of the Agukwu section of the town. The people of the other sections, Diodo and Akamkpisi will simply ignore him. If the big man is a member of the *Nzemabua*, and he tries to over-step the boundaries of constitutionality and respectability, the *Nzemabu* of Diodo and Akamkpisi will simply boycott the *Nzemabu* meetings. The Eze Nri will not tolerate such a situation. The big man must either swallow his pride or face very unpleasant and unpopular ritual and secular measures directed against him by the Eze Nri.

#### *Checks based on religious ideology*

There are four major religious checks that limit the influence of a big man. Eze Nri can pronounce anathema on any man. In the past, if it was an anathema of banishment, the person was forced to leave Nri and settle elsewhere. Some Nri lineages outside Nri claim that their founders were banished from Nri. If it is an anathema of taboo the person becomes an object of taboo. In effect it means the person's minimal and maximal lineages would force him to concede and repent by ignoring him until Eze Nri removes the curse. Previously, the ritual consequence of such a curse was considered very grave, for it negated the concept of the good man which was central to Nri ethics.

The second ritual check is the annual confession held at *onu ebo* by all *ozo* men. All *ozo* men (and all big men are *ozo men*) are expected to attend the *onu ebo* ritual confession held once a year. In this ritual each *ozo* man confesses publicly, to other *ozo* men, all his anti-social acts. In a small community like Nri it was impossible to hide one's anti-social acts. It was believed that the consequence of hiding such acts was immediate illness followed by a disgraceful death. In the past, only *ozo* men who attended this annual ritual confession could attend the palace of Eze Nri to discuss public affairs with truth and integrity, before the *ofo* and *alo* of Eze Nri. Also only *ozo* men who attended could stand up before their minimal or maximal lineages to claim the right to be respectable leaders.

The third ritual check is that of the *mmanwu* cult group. During the *Onwa Agwu* month, the



*mmanwu* will sing and chant about the anti-social acts of any one, including the big men. Through this type of community 'mass media' persons who are ordinarily feared are subjected to the criticism of public opinion.

The fourth ritual check is that generated by the diviners. The diviners interpret the fortune and misfortune of Nri society in terms of the nature of the relationship between individuals, between individuals and groups and between groups. Thus if the growing power of a big man endangers the freedom of other individuals or groups, the diviners will at once galvanize public opinion to deter the excesses and ambition of such a big man.

*Checks based on the structure of the political and economic system*

The source of wealth lies outside Nri. In the past Eze Nri, who is still ritually tabooed from participating in wealth accumulation, controlled these sources of wealth. He could ban an individual from acting as a Nri agent, thus precluding the individual from using one of the major means of getting wealth. He with his *Nzemabua* could divest an *ozo* man of his *ozo* title. He could alter the operational areas in Igbo land allocated to the various maximal lineages. He can still call on the *okolobia* group to take decisions over and above the *ozo*-titled men. His palace was the major channel and check point of redistribution. Other maximal lineages are subordinate check points, partly controlled by various *ozo*-titled men or by an elder.

The elaborate title system which culminates in the purchase of the *ofo* staff and the moral obligation of taking titles for one's children and collateral relations, limit the amount of wealth a big man can expend to maintain considerable following within and outside his maximal lineage.

Another important factor to be considered regarding the accumulation and distribution of wealth is the system of inheritance. Whatever wealth is accumulated during one's early economic life is used for title taking, which culminates in the *ozo* titles. By the time a man purchases the seven *ofo* staff and takes the final title of *ntufuazu*, and by the time he has taken titles for his children and his collateral relations, most of his wealth would have been dissipated. After a man's death, the cost of the elaborate mortuary rites of *ozo* men is paid from his estate. His debts are paid and what

remains, both movable and immovable, is shared amongst all his living sons following the Nri inheritance rule of proportional division; each son inherits a given proportion of his father's estate. Thus the title system encourages the dispersal of a man's wealth not only during his lifetime but also in the generation after his death.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a period of both economic and political decline for Nri. Considering the Nri system of title taking and the inheritance system, and the Nri ambivalence towards slave trade, it was very unlikely that an individual whose ambition was to dominate not only members of his lineage but also those outside his maximal lineages would have sufficient wealth at his command to achieve his aim. Had he such wealth, other factors discussed above would militate against him. The system was such that even by the turn of the century the rising 'class' of new men, becoming wealthy with the growth and development of new commerce, were unable to challenge effectively the power and authority of established office holders as was the case in Onitsha.

## CHAPTER FIVE: NOTES

1. A king is the head of a state, and is set apart by a special coronation ceremony. The office of kingship is generally hereditary. Subordinate rulers under the king may be called chiefs. In the case of Nri, Eze Nri is the king. His twenty-four *Nzemabua* are his major chiefs and the other *ozo*-titled men are his minor chiefs (see Chapter 7). In the past, some heads of other Igbo settlements under Nri were kings and Eze Nri was the king that crowned kings, *Eze ne chibe eze*.
2. In the past it was rare to find a young man below forty holding the *ozo* title, because the *ozo* title was only taken by persons whose fathers had died and it involved a great deal of wealth which could be accumulated only after a long period of hard work as an adult. The abrogation of the taboo that specified that it was abomination to be an *ozo* man while one's father was still alive was achieved around 1932. The rise of a new elite in Nri has changed the pattern, but even in 1967 the average age of *ozo* men was 37 years and not one *ozo* man was below 35 years.
3. I took this title in 1967 after a payment of 7s 6d and one gallon of palm wine.
4. Successful women take this title, as described later in this chapter.

5. *Ichi* marks, which were only made on Nri men, later became one of the titles which Nri men spread over a large portion of Igbo land. Five types are distinguished and are named after the town of the artists who made them, namely: *ichi Umu Dioka Ukpo* was made by Umu Dioka of Ukpo town, *ichi Umu Dioka Ezenu*, *ichi Umu Ori*, *ichi Diokpala*. The fifth type is the *ichi* of Ibusa, Asaba, Illah and in Nri. It does not involve cutting marks on the face but involves the ritual seclusion of the person for twenty-one days or a symbolic touch on the face with a knife during the *ichi* ritual.
- The present Nri men have the *ichi* mark according to the style peculiar to *Umu Dioka Ori (neni)*. The ones found in Igbo-ukwu bronze are called *ichi Umu Dioka Ukpo*, made by Ukpo artists and still found on the faces of people of Umuna and Ebenebe living fifteen miles north-east of Nri. Umuna and Ebenebe were places formerly under Eze Nri's sphere of influence.
6. The description given here is a brief outline of the procedure as given to me by informants who took the title before 1930 and have marks on their faces.
7. This refers to the myth of how Eze Nri brought yam (see Chapter 4).
8. I witnessed ten cases of persons taking this title between 1967 and 1972.
9. If a man is not responsible in his behaviour, the *ozo* group will refuse his payment and thus delay his taking the title until they are satisfied that he merits the *ozo* position.
10. Today some Christians and the educated elite take the *ozo* title by making a payment of ₦600 to the *ogwe mmuo* of their lineage. The usual ritual procedures are not followed. The paraphernalia are handed over to the person during a big feast organized by the person. But traditional men still follow the traditional procedures as closely as possible.
11. The symbolic meaning of these trees and the *ngwo* solutions and other acts done in this ritual cannot be explained here, but all point towards the idea of purifying the tongue, followed by an act of oath taking, as shown in the blood dropped on the tongue and the ground, which symbolizes that the *Alusi Ana* bears witness to the covenant. The *ozo* men consumed the hen and bear witness to the oath taken by the new *ozo* man.
12. N.W. THOMAS, *op. cit.*
13. D.C. TOVEY, 1929 report on Ujalli Court Areas.
14. M.D.W. JEFFREYS, *The Divine Umu Ndi: Kings of Igbo Land*, 1934, Chapters 7-10.
- Jeffreys had a detailed account of the coronation of Eze Nri as told by some Nri elders who were young men when Nri Obalike was crowned in 1898. Differences in my account and his are mainly on the sequence of the procedure, about which I was particular. Procedures may vary from generation to generation but the essential framework continues to exist.
15. Once an Eze Nri is enthroned he can never be dethroned, removed or displaced. After his death at least seven years must elapse before a new king is enthroned.
16. K. MARX, *Capital*, 1970.
17. G. HOMANS, 'Social Behaviour as Exchange' in *American Review*, 1958; *Social Behaviour: its elementary forms*, 1961.
18. P.M. BLAU, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, 1964.
19. F.G. BAILEY, *Stratagems and Spoils*, 1969.
20. B. KAPFERER, 'Norms and the manipulation of relationships in the work context', 1969.
21. R.N. HENDERSON, *The King in Every Man, Evolutionary trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture*, 1972.



## **Part Two**

# Political Dynamics



## Chapter 6

# Political Groupings Based on Lineage Principles

This Chapter deals to some extent with the scope and limitations on the dynamics of kinship in determining political strategies in respect of group formation in Nri.<sup>1</sup> In Chapter 2 I outlined the political history of Nri and one of the major issues discussed was the heterogenous origin of the settlements that later federated to become Nri town.

During the formative period in the time of Nri Ifikuanim, various independent groups of peoples probably lived not very far from one another. These groups were defined in terms of kinship and territoriality. Each group was independent of the other, for each had its own founding temple, *obu*, *ofo* and *alo* staffs and *Alusi* supernatural beings, its four markets and its own autonomous political system. Later these groups were unified politically under Eze Nri whose power and authority in certain human relationships transcended those of the original groups and other later groups. But each group continued to maintain its territorial integrity.<sup>2</sup>

### Territoriality in Nri

Territoriality is a dynamic factor in determining the correlation between kinship and political actions in Nri. According to Nri history, Nri was in the beginning inhabited by an indigenous people called Umu Diana – ‘the children of the land’. One of their earliest leaders was Ezikanebo. They at first occupied the south-west of Nri when Nri Ifikuanim migrated to the area (see Map 8). Nri Ifikuanim and his followers settled in the north of Nri and called it *Agukwu*. Before his death he divided his estate amongst his three children, who became the founders of the maximal lineages of *Agukwu*; *Onyiora* was the founder of *Agbadana*, *Alikenri* was the founder of *Uruoji*, and *Ogboo* (*Nribuife*) was the founder of *Obeagu*. Thus

*Agukwu* had three maximal lineages occupying discrete territories.

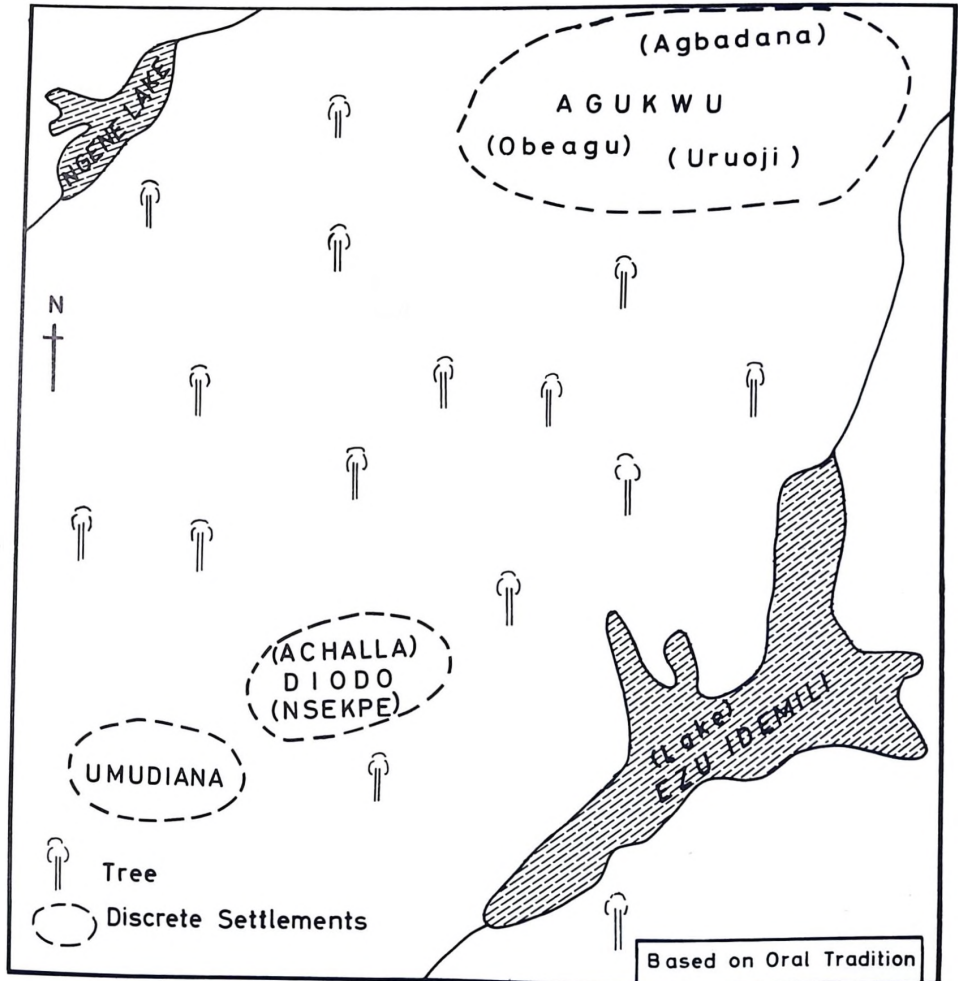
Another group of immigrants headed by Nri *Namoke* came and settled near the lake called *Ezu Idemmili*. Already there were two groups of peoples, called *Nsekpe* and *Achalla*, who lived near the lake before the arrival of Nri *Namoke*. The groups merged with *Namoke*’s group and were called *Diodo*.

Thus three independent villages called *Umu Diana*, *Agukwu* and *Diodo* probably existed during the time of *Ezikanebo*, Nri *Ifikuanim* and Nri *Namoke*. A marriage alliance between *Agukwu* and *Diodo*, and between *Agukwu* and *Umu Diana* was followed by the unification of the three villages by *Eze Nribuife* into the town now called Nri. The palace of *Nribuife* was situated at *Diodo* because he was first *Eze Nri* of *Diodo*. Later, he also became *Eze Nri* of *Agukwu* and *Umu Diana*. To consolidate his position he agreed that kingship should circulate among the maximal lineages of *Obeagu*, *Uruoji* and *Agbadana* and he also appointed *ozo* men, six from *Agukwu* and six from *Diodo* and *Umu Diana*, to be his chief councillors, called *Nzemabua*.

By the time of *Eze Nri Ewenetem*, the twelfth king, *Agbadana* maximal lineage of *Agukwu* had abandoned their original site in the north-east of Nri and settled in their present site, which is south-west of the former (see Map 9). During this period the *Umu Diana* had also abandoned their former site and moved northwards. Later, lineages of *Umu Diana*, now called *Agbana*, *Enuora*, *Ezike* *Ogbalite* and *Okpatulu* broke off and occupied new sites to the north, leaving the core of their parent segment to the south.

After many generations, a lineage from *Enugu-Ukwu*, headed by *Adikwanwoke*, joined the lineages of *Ezike* *Ogbalite* and *Okpatulu*, and the three are

Map 8 The Core of the Original Settlement Pattern

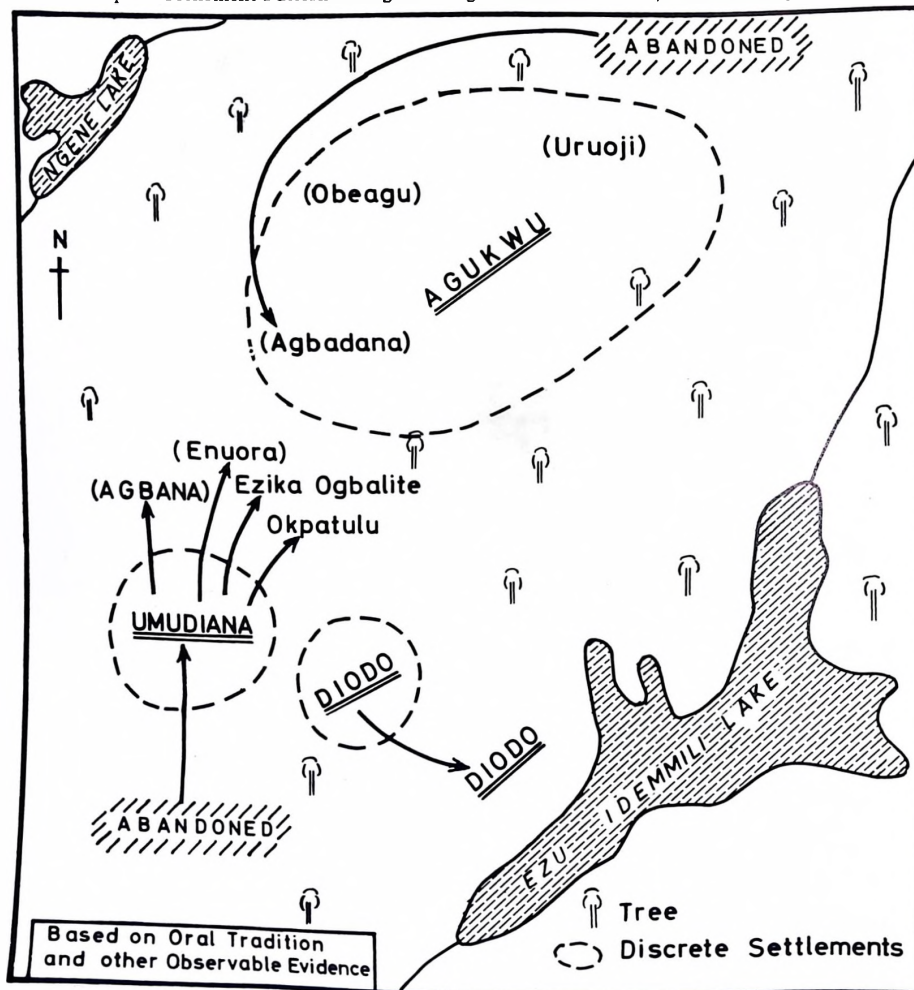


now called Uru Ofolo. The Umu Diana, Enuora, Agbana and Uru Ofolo segments are today called *Akamkpisi*. Agbana and Enuora are generally called *Ekwenanuka*.<sup>3</sup> Also during this period, a segment of Diodo moved southwards. These people now inhabit the north-west slope of the bank of the Idemili lake.

By the time of my study 1966-72, the settlement

pattern was as shown in Maps 10 and 11. Map 10 shows the movement that had probably occurred between Eze Nri Ewenetem's reign and the present day. In Agukwu, Uruoji maximal lineage had spread southwards from their original site. Obeagu expansion southwards was rather more explosive and has continued to the present day. The Agbadana still live in a very compact settle-

Map 9 Settlement Pattern during the Reign of Nri Ewenetem, 18th Century

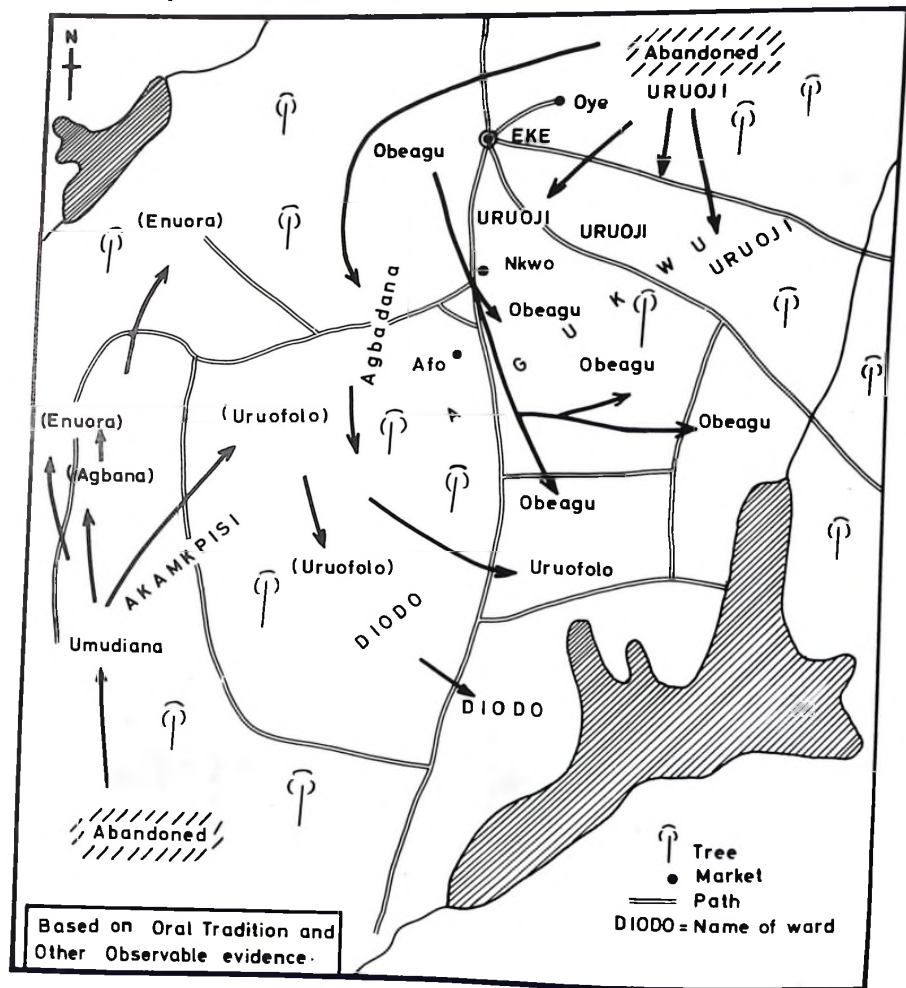


ment characteristic of urban settlements. But recently some Agbadana people have started buying land from some Uru Ofolo people and are beginning to move southwards. A good number of Uru Ofolo have also moved south-east towards the lake to establish their claim over the ownership of land in that area which some Obeagu people have acquired from them by sale or gift. Similarly,

Enuora and Agbana have moved northwards to occupy the land near to the Ngene lake.

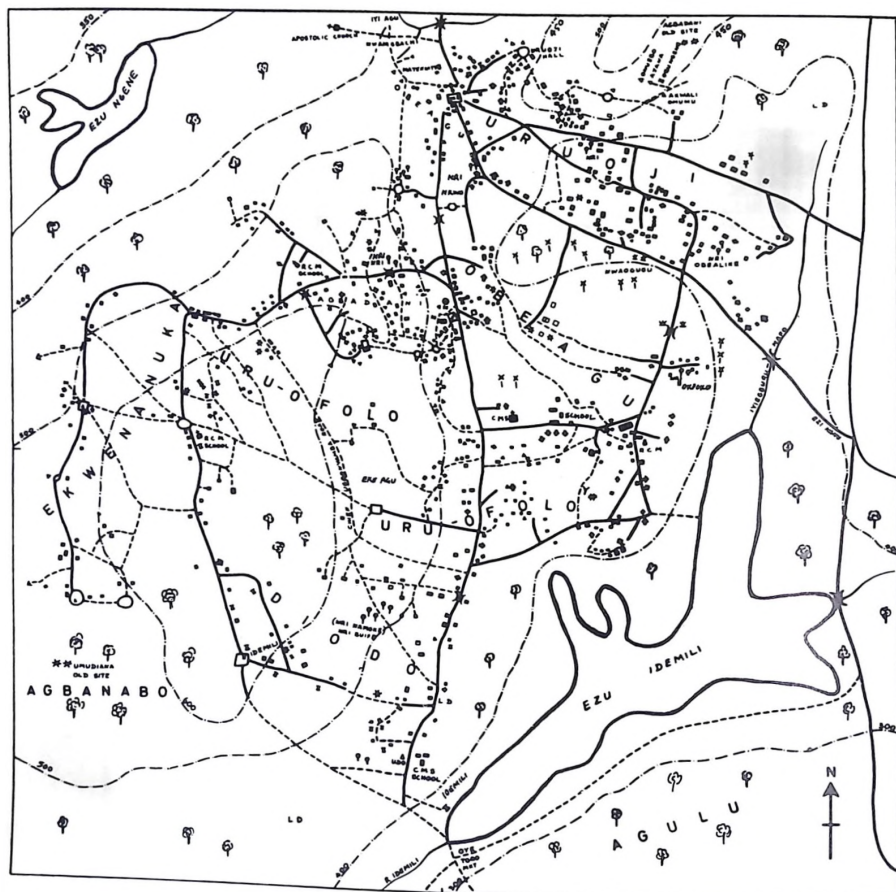
The territorial division of Nri, which was formerly characterized by three distinct villages separated by thick forested land, is gradually becoming blurred, as shown in Map 11, as a result of the expansion of the former villages in all directions. I shall refer to these villages as wards.

Map 10 Settlement Pattern and Movements, 19th Century to Present





Map 11 Anthropographic Map of Nri (1966-68)



- MODERN MALE COMPOUND
- ◆ MODERN COMPOUND WITH STOREY BUILDING
- COMPOUND WITH TRADITIONAL WALL/DOOR
- WOMAN'S HOUSE
- \* ABANDONED SITE
- ⊙ MMUO HOUSE
- ⚡ PUBLIC TEMPLES (OBU MGBAKO)
- MODERN STORES AND SHOPS
- ▲ SHRINES

- # NGIGE
- ⦿ BURIAL FOREST
- ⦿ MIXED FOREST
- OPEN PLACES AND SQUARES
- MARKET - EKE, AFO, OYE, NKWO
- Y PALM FOREST
- Y IYI
- ≡ SWAMP
- ⊖ LAKE

- ⦿ A VILLAGE
- LD LAND DISPUTE IN PROGRESS
- MOTORABLE ROADS
- PATHS
- CONTOUR
- RIVER OR STREAM
- ⦿ CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY
- ⦿ ROMAN CATHOLIC MISSION
- ⦿ APOSTOLIC CHURCH

But the locations of the original settlements, temples and shrines still remain as landmarks and the evershifting boundaries between the former villages and lineages are roughly identifiable.

Politically, Nri people recognize two types of territorial divisions, the tripartite and the dual. The tripartite division is Agukwu, Diodo and Akamkpisi, and the dual division is Agukwu and Diodo-Adamkpisi. The Agukwu section is also called Ezi; it is in the north-eastern area where roads leading into Nri converge. The Diodo-Akamkpisi section is called Ifite, and comprises the interior south-west. The territorial divisions of Nri may be summarized as in Table 17.

Table 17 The Territorial Divisions of Nri

Dual	Tripartite	Ward sections
	Wards (Villages)	Sub-villages or lineage cores
Ezi	Agukwu c. 7,000 population	Agbadana Uruoji Obeagu
Ifite	Diodo c. 500 population	Nrinamoke Nsekpe Achalla
	Akamkpisi c. 2,500 population	Umudiana Enuora Agbana Uruofolo

### The Structure of Nri Segmentary Lineages

The basic social structure of Nri rests on a system of partilineal segmentary lineages. The institution of a sacred kingship is superimposed on this structure. I will examine the importance of segmentary lineages in determining the formation, structure, autonomy and continuity of groups whose main objectives are directed towards political action and their relationship in terms of equality or inequality.

There are several stages in the cyclic development of the families occupying a compound. At the early stage some compounds are occupied by a simple or compound family with few relations and strangers. The owner and head of the compound is agnatically related to the owner and head of other adjacent compounds. Such a small compound has a population of about 5-15 persons. Compounds in their later developmental stage are occupied by one to six extended families whose males, except for a few strangers, sisters' sons or daughters' sons, are agnatically related to a common ancestor to whom a collective temple is

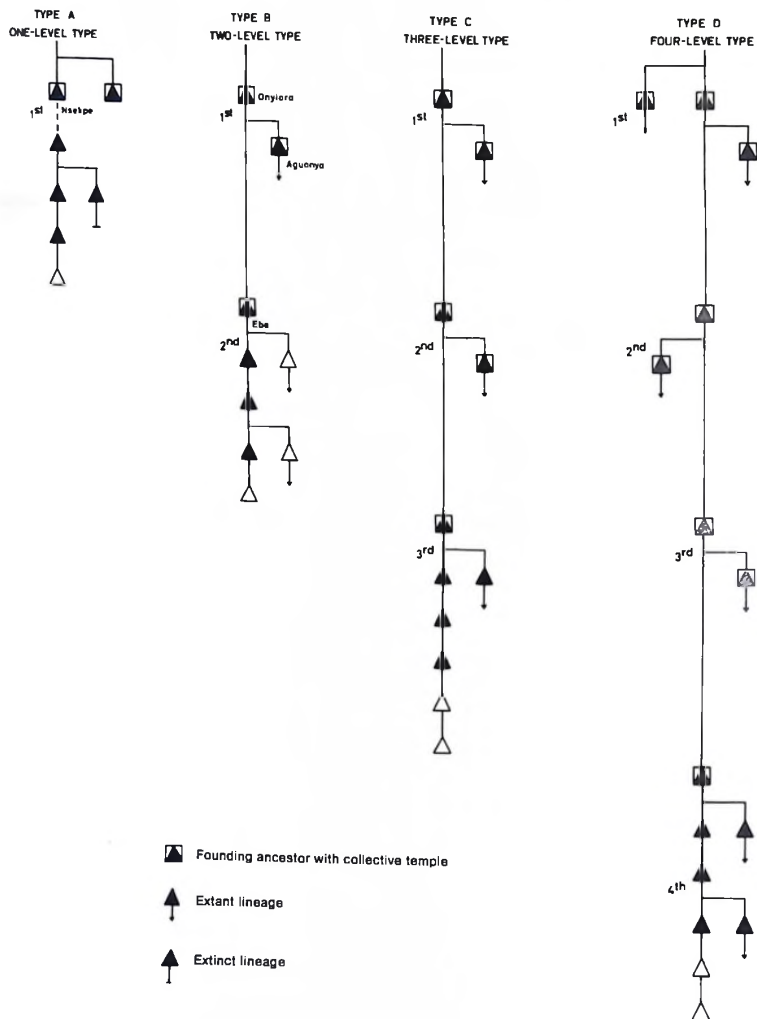
dedicated. The head of each family has his own temple. The collective temple is inherited following the rule of primogeniture. The inheritor is the custodian, but the chief priest and head of the unit is the first man to take the *ozo* title. Such a big compound may have 10-30 persons. Compounds are separated by plots of farmland but some are built close to one another.

Groups of compounds having a common ancestor and a common temple form patrilineages of various depth and span. These patrilineages are ranked in order of seniority and importance according to their level of genealogical depth, although not strictly so. In the case of Nri, ideally a maximal lineage has greater political authority than a major, and a major has more than a minor, and a minor more than a minimal. Similarly a leader who is associated with a maximal lineage has more political power and authority than a leader associated with a major lineage, and so on. This is why it is appropriate to refer to Nri genealogy as hierarchically structured, meaning that its component lineages are organized in grades of authority from lowest to highest. Four types of hierarchy may occur, the four-level, the three-level, the two-level and the one-level. (See Figure 8).

A four-level type has minimal, minor, major and maximal lineages; a three-level, minimal, major and maximal lineages, and a two-level type has only a minimal and a maximal order of segmentation. A one-level type has a minimal level of segmentation which does, however, operate functionally as a maximal lineage. The variations that occur are due to many factors such as historical, population and leadership struggle. The total genealogy of Agukwu, Diodo and Akamkpisi, in which the various levels of lineages described above are featured, is shown in Figures 9 and 10.

In Nri, the minimal lineage is the smallest segment that is of political significance. It is generally four to five generations from the present living elders, who were born in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In some cases the generations may be more or less. The minimal lineage is named after the founding ancestor and members of the lineage call themselves the children of the ancestor. For example, *Umu Ewenetem* is a minimal lineage name after an ancestor *Ewenetem* (*umu* = children). The minimal lineage has a temple in

Figure 8. Types of Lineage Levels in Nri



which all members congregate for ritual or political actions. The temple is called *Obu Ewenetem* (*obu* = temple). The minimal lineage is also the only unit that owns and administers the *ibene* oath to its members. The oath, unlike all other types of oath in Nri, is believed to destroy only the person who swears falsely, while the other types of oath destroy the person's lateral and collateral relations. So the oath is used in administering justice within the minimal lineage and is therefore a useful index (among a number of others) to help indicate whether a lineage has fully assumed the status of a minimal lineage.

The minimal lineage is also a land holding unit and the members of the lineage generally live together in a discrete territory prior to the expansion described above. At present, although some members have dispersed, the former territorial core of minimal lineages is still maintained, and even in the new territory there is still a strong tendency for members of the same lineage to keep together.

Members of the lineage, men and women, identify themselves first as members of their minimal lineage. Since marriage is viri-local, women – especially elderly ones – of other patrilineages who are married into their husbands' lineages strongly identify themselves with members of their husbands' patrilineages. The rights and duties of a person, such as those based on inheritance, succession, residence and title-taking, and a person's social, moral, jural and ritual responsibilities, are first defined in terms of the person's membership of his minimal lineage. Hence, in Nri, if a man or woman is asked 'Where are you from?', he or she automatically names his or her minimal lineage. Membership of a minimal lineage is defined in terms of birth, adoption and long residential attachment to the minimal lineage.<sup>1</sup>

A member of a minimal lineage is also a member of more inclusive lineages structured hierarchically through the minor to the maximal lineage. A person's rights and duties in the various levels in the hierarchy are defined in terms of the specific rights and duties attached to the level. Each of the lineages above the minimal is also a corporate group, for each has, at least, a common temple dedicated to and named after the founding ancestor, and members congregate in the temple for ritual or political activities. These lineages also share cults and may have common

land. Members generally live together, but some have moved to where land is available.

It has to be pointed out that in the Nri case segmentation and temples do exist below the level of the minimal lineages, but these lineages and temples are regarded as unimportant in the political field.<sup>3</sup>

These lineages and temples of the same order of segmentation are not equal in status and importance. Some lineages have lost the functional role and status of a maximal lineage; they have been relegated, at least temporarily, to the role of a minimal lineage. Similarly, some minor lineages have abdicated their function to their component minimal lineages and some minimal lineages have absorbed the function of their major lineage. In the Nri system, lineages of the same order of segmentation and of the same span and depth differ considerably in terms of equality and dominance. This is one important difference between the Nri segmentary system and that of the Tiv or Tallensi.<sup>6</sup>

The inequality in the status of the lineages is attributed to variations in the ages and status of persons who founded the lineages, population size, role differentiation, historical accidents and leadership struggle. Such inequalities impose limitations on the type of political strategy adopted by its individual members. An understanding of these inequalities is essential to an understanding of the dynamics of conflict in the Nri political system.

### Lineage Status – Aspects of Equality and Inequality

All things being equal, the political status of a lineage and its temple can be determined genealogically by reference to its horizontal and vertical placement in the total genealogical structure. For example, the ranking of lineages from minimal to maximal is an aspect of the vertical placement of lineages. Similarly the political status of a lineage and its temple can be determined genealogically by reference to its horizontal placement. But lineages and temples may occur at the same generational level and may or may not be equal in status. Some are dominant and others are subordinate in terms of political action, and yet others are completely absorbed by related dominant collateral lineages.

These types of lineage inequalities in Nri



Figure 9. Agukwu (Nri) Genealogy

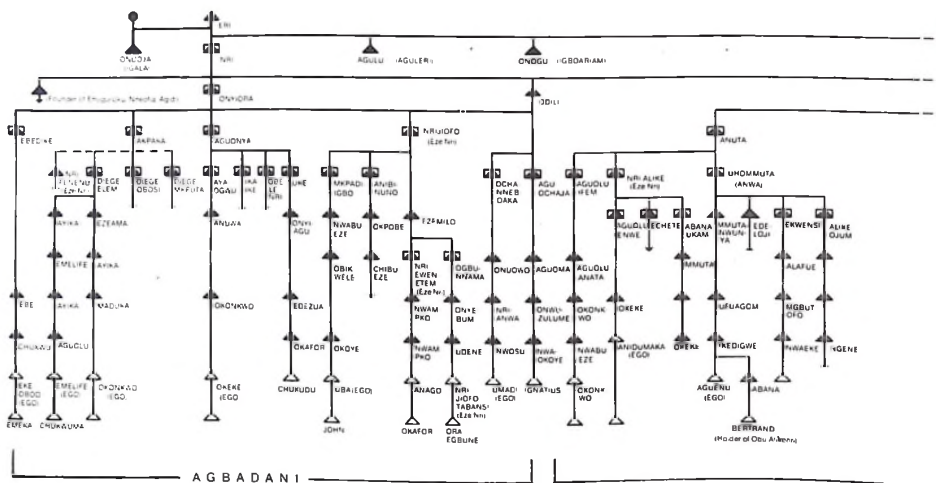
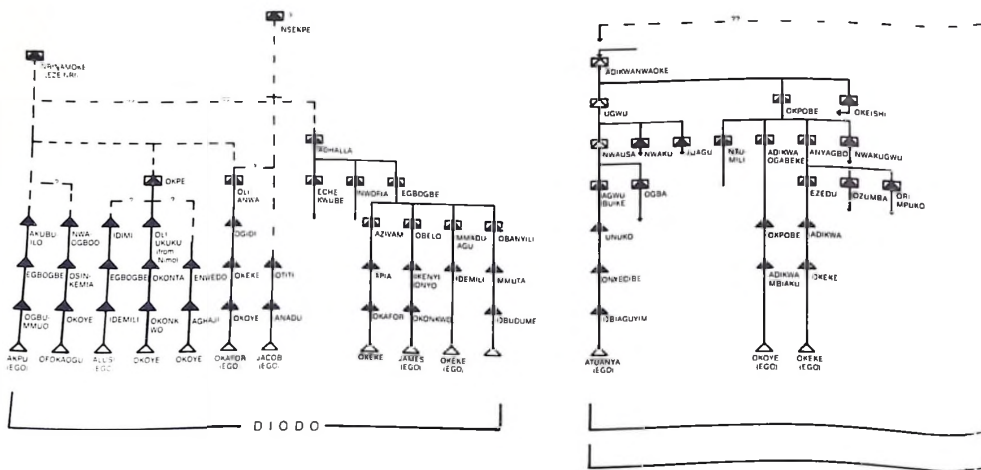
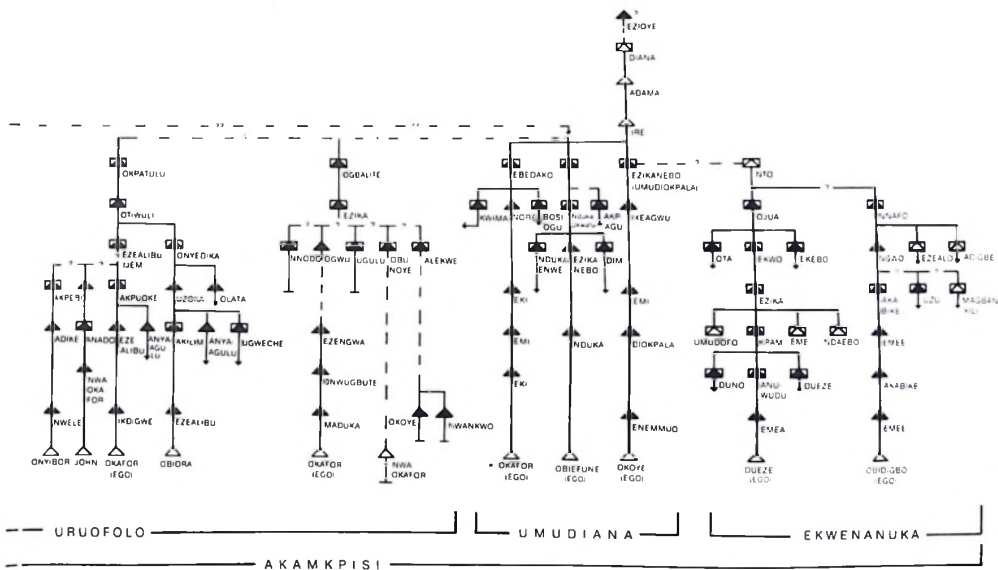
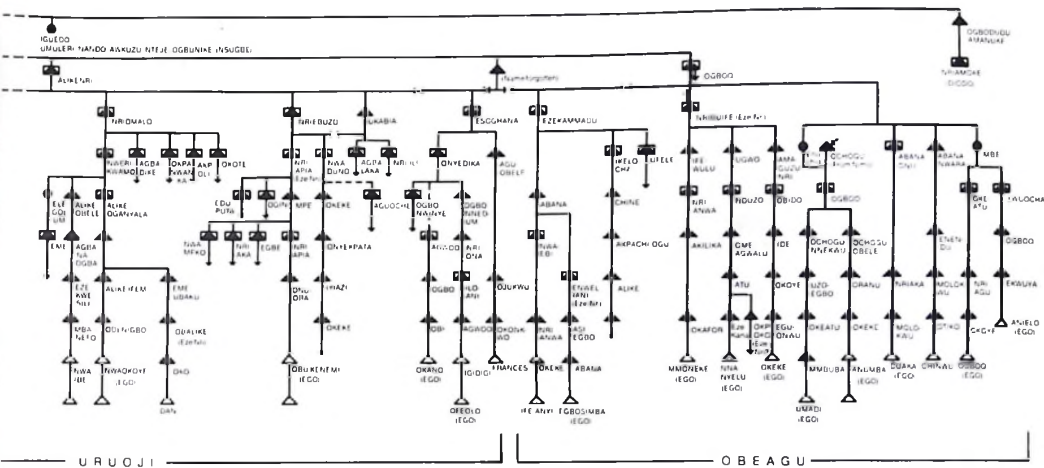


Figure 10. Diodo and Akampkisi (Nri) Genealogy





genealogical structure generate political action. I will discuss the types of lineage groupings in Agukwu, Diodo and Akamkpisi and the occurrence of equalities and inequalities, dealing mainly with the Agukwu case for the sake of brevity.

### Agukwu

To follow and appreciate the argument here, it is helpful to refer to the genealogy chart (Figure 9). According to Agukwu traditions of their origin, shown diagrammatically in genealogical form in Figure 9, Eri bore Nri Ifikuanim who bore Onyiora, Odili, Alikenri, Ogboo, and the father of Esoghana and Ezekamadu. Onyiora was the first son, *okpala*, and had the same mother as Odili. Alikenri was the second son and Ogboo was the third. Ogboo died without *ozo* title when his first son and his youngest son, Nribuife, were still young. Later Nribuife became a king of Nri and unified the whole town. Nribuife genealogically displaced his father Ogboo and is now considered the founder of the lineage – it is now called Umu Nribuife. Thus Umu Nribuife's lineage and temple became dominant over that of his father's lineage and temple. Odili, who lived as a child with Onyiora, was considered Onyiora's 'son' and not his brother. Thus Odili lost his status in the horizontal placement in the genealogy and also had no temple dedicated to him. Two of Odili's lineages became minimal lineages under the maximal lineage of Onyiora, and these two lineages are jointly accorded the status of a major lineage under the name of Uruanuta. To this day, Odili lineage, although its founder was structurally equal in the horizontal genealogical placement with Onyiora, is now subordinate to Onyiora. Odili's lineages are therefore horizontally displaced two generations down and this reduced them to minimal lineages.

Similarly the father of Esoghana and Ezekamadu, who died young without *ozo* title, lost his equality with his brothers Onyiora and Alikenri. The lineages of Esoghana and Ezekamadu assumed the status of major lineages in their respective maximal lineages. Since Alikenri cared for Esoghana, the major lineage of the latter became attached to Alikenri's maximal lineage and, similarly, since Ogboo cared for Ezekamadu his lineages became attached to Nribuife's maximal lineage. I shall refer to these two major lineages of Esoghana and Ezekamadu later on.

The three displacements discussed above, that

of Odili, that of the father of Esoghana and Ezekamadu and that of Ogboo, continually affect the political status and the political actions of the various lineages that were formed by these persons. That is why at the Onyiora generational level only three maximal lineages are recognized instead of five. These three are: Umu Onyiora, occupying a territory called Agbadana; Umu Alikenri, occupying a territory called Uruoji; and Umu Nribuife, occupying a territory called Obeagu.

The status of Umu Onyiora *vis-a-vis* that of Umu Alikenri was affected by the factor of achievement. According to tradition, Alikenri took the *ozo* title before his senior brother Onyiora and so became senior by title. The descendants of Alikenri inherited the *ozo* temple and the *ozo* title paraphernalia of Nri Ifikuanim. The consequence of this is that lineages derived from Alikenri enjoy a status superior to those derived from Onyiora. At the level of segmentation below that of Alikenri-Nyiora-Nribuife, Onyiora 'bore' Ebedike, the first son, followed by Akpaka, Aguonya and Nrijiifo. These four are now regarded as founders of the four major segments, Umu Ebedike, Umu Nechi (Akpaka), Umu Aguonya and Umu Nrijiifo, listed here in their accepted order of seniority.

Alikenri bore Ukabia, Anuta, Nri Omalo and Nri Ebuza and adopted Esoghana, who was Alikenri's brother's son. Ukabia was Alikenri's first son, *Okpala*, but Ukabia was disinherited and ostracized by his father, who made Anuta his first son. Anuta's first son, Uhu, inherited the temple of Nri Ifikuanim and passed it down to the present holder Bertrand Ikidigwe, who is also first son (See Chapter 8).

After Alikenri's death Ukabia's descendants returned to Nri and attached themselves to Nri Ebuza lineages since they and Ukabia were 'brothers', of the same 'mother'. Because Ukabia was displaced, only four lineages are recognized at this level as major lineages, ranked in this order of seniority based on the ages of the founders: Umu Anuta, Umu Esoghana, Umu Nri Ebuza and Umu Nri Omalo. Ukabia is recognized as a minimal lineage and up to this day its members are still struggling hard, without much success, to be recognized as a major lineage.

Ogboo, the last son of Nri Ifikuanim, bore Nribuife, Abana Onu and Abana Nwara. Ogboo also had two daughters, Mbe and Enuchia, who remained in their father's lineage with their children.

Ogboo also adopted Ezekamadu, his brother's son. Earlier, I showed how Nribuife's lineage superseded that of his father; the lineage also superseded those formed by Nribuife's brothers, that of Ezekamadu and those of his sisters; I shall come to this later on.

At the third level of segmentation in Umu Onyiora's maximal lineage of Agbadana, Ebedike major lineage was not further divided into minimal lineage segments; it is a two-level type. But Akpaka has one minor and two minimal lineages; the minor lineage is Umu Diegelem which is dominant in status over the two minimals Umu Diege Obosi and Umu Diege Mkputa, which occur at the same level with Umu Diegelem. Umu Diegelem has two minimal lineages, Umu Ezeama and Umu Ayika, but at present they are functionally more important than Umu Diegelem. The process of displacement, at least functionally, is gradually taking place. Aguonya major lineage segmented into four minimal lineages: Umu Ayaogwu, Umu Akaike, Umu Obelenri and Umu Uke. Umu Nrijiro major lineage, which was lower in the genealogical structure, became equal to Ebedike, Akpaka and Aguonya in terms of status, because Nrijiro the founder was a famous Eze Nri with extant lineages. Umu Nrijiro segmented into two minimal lineages, Umu Mkpadiogo and Umu Anabinuno, and one minor, Eze Ezimilo.

Ezimilo bore Ewenetem, so the status of Umu Nri Ewenetem *vis-a-vis* those of Umu Mkpadiogo and Umu Anabinuno needs further comment. Genealogically, Mkpadiogo and Anabinuno are placed higher than Ewenetem. But functionally the lineages of Ewenetem and Ogbannama are together considered as Umu Ewenetem, though they should be Umu Ezimilo. Ezimilo was an Eze Nri who was murdered, as a result of which the former site of Agbadana was abandoned during the reign of his son, Nri Ewenetem. The temple of Nri Ezimilo was abandoned because it was associated with 'bad death'. In the political context this means that Nri Ezimilo has been displaced. The net result is that the two minimal lineages of Umu Ewenetem and Umu Ogbannama are acting as one and are jointly considered equal to Umu Anabinuno and Umu Mkpadiogo, which are structurally superior in genealogical placement.

I have earlier on dealt with the status of the maximal and major lineages of Uruoji; now I shall deal with the status of the minor and minimal

lineages. Anuta major lineage has two minor lineages and one minimal lineage. The minimal lineage is Umu Aguolu Ifem and the minor lineages are Umu Nri Alike and Umu Uhommuta. The minor lineage of Umu Nri Alike has three minimal lineages: Aguolu Enwe, Echeta and Abana Ukam. The minor lineage of Umu Uhommuta has three minimal lineages: Umu Uho, Ekwensi and Alike Ojum. The minimal lineage of Aguolu Ifem is closely associated with Umu Nri Alike and is considered a lineage under Nri Alike. Aguolu Ifem lineage should be equal to Nri Alike since the founder was Nri Alike's elder brother. But Nri Alike became Eze Nri and the lineage and temple he founded became prominent and dominated the lineage founded by Aguolu Ifem. Umu Nri Alike and Umu Uhommuta are two minor lineages that claim seniority. Uhommuta was the senior son of Anuta and inherited the *ofa-ozo* and the domestic temple of Nri Ifikuanim through Alikenri and Anuta. Nri Alike was the junior son and became Eze Nri. The lineages of the senior son claimed seniority over the lineages of the junior son who became Eze Nri, and vice versa. The first open conflict occurred, according to Nri history, during the lifetime of Mmutanwunya. The most recent conflict within this group over the leadership of the temple of Nri Ifikuanim-Alikenri began in 1905 when the British Administration was established. This struggle was recently settled and is discussed in Chapter 8.

The Umu Nri Omalo major lineage has one minor lineage called Nweri Nnama and four minimals: Agbadike, Okpanwanka, Akpoli and Okote. The minor lineage of Nweri Nnama has three minimal lineages: Alike Ogalanya, Alike Obele and Eme. The dominance of the minor lineage of Nweri Nnama over the four minimal lineages that were founded by his brothers is based on wealth and population.

Umu Nri Ebuzo major lineage has two minor lineages, Nri Apia and Nwaduno, and two minimal lineages, Agbalaka and Nri Ili. The two minimal lineages, although they occur at the same generational level as the two minors, are regarded as subordinate to them because they were lineages derived from Ukabia who was disowned and ostracized. The minor lineage of Nri Apia has six minimal lineages: Eduputa, Ogini, Nwamkpo, Nriaka, Egbe and Nri Apia. The position of the first two, Eduputa and Ogini, is interesting. Both



would have assumed a higher status structurally in the genealogy but their mother, who was from a neighbouring town, took them to her town when they were young. They came back a generation later and re-established their lineages, which became both structurally and functionally equivalent to minimal lineages. The minor lineage of Nwaduno has two minimal lineages, Nwaduno and Aguocha.

Esoghana, who was the brother of Ezekamadu, lived with Alikemri and Esoghana's lineage became a major lineage equal to other major lineages of Agukwu. The lineage splits into a minor lineage, Umu Onyedika, and into one minimal, Umu Aguobe. Onyedika segments into three minimal lineages: Ogbo Agwu, Nwiny, and Nnedum (Ezekwem). Onyedika minor lineage seems to dominate the politics of Umu Esoghana because most of the members of Umu Aguobe have migrated to other Igbo settlements during the past two centuries.

In Obeagu the status of the lineages is somewhat curious. Nribuife displaced his father Ogboo genealogically and became a maximal lineage. Three minimal lineages directly emerge from Nribuife, namely Nri Anwa, Nduzo and Obido Okano. These three are called Umu Nri Obeagu and when they combine together politically are accorded the status of a major lineage. But when all lineages in Obeagu act together, Umu Nri becomes the leader of a maximal lineage. As discussed above, Ogboo became a major lineage and the lineages of his other sons and daughters emerged as minimal lineages. Thus the Umu Abana Nwara, Umu Abana Onu, Umu Ochogu and Umu Mbe have minimal status.

Turning to the lineages formed by Ogboo's daughters' children, *nwadia*, Ochogu was from Egbengu Nimo, a neighbouring town, and lived with Nribuife and married Nribuife's 'sister' Enuchia and bore Ogboo Ochogu. Ogboo Ochogu continued to live in his mother's brother's home and his lineage became attached to Ogboo's major lineage because Ogboo Ochogu was re-incarnated by Ogboo. Mbe was also the daughter of Ogboo and 'sister' of Nribuife. She bore Okeatu and Ewuocha who remained in their father's home and are called Umu Mbe. They are two minimal lineages that act together as one minimal lineage.

In the past the lineages of Ochogu, Abana

Nwara, Abana Onu and Mbe all attended the collective temple of Ogboo and acted as one major lineage. After a quarrel at the close of the nineteenth century which lingered into the early part of the twentieth century, Mbe and Ochogu broke away and remained separate. But all the lineages still regard themselves as members of one maximal lineage of Umu Nribuife. At present, even though genealogically Umu Abana Nwara, Umu Mbe and Umu Ochogu are minimal lineages, they assume the status of a major lineage in their external relations with other lineages of Agukwu. This results partly from the quarrel and partly from the population growth of Umu Mbe and Umu Ochogu and the emergence of dynamic leaders in these lineages since the beginning of this century.

Ezekamadu, the brother of Esoghana of Uruoji, who lived with Ogboo and so was attached to Nribuife, emerged as a major lineage. It has four minimal lineages segmenting from it, Nwaebi, Enweleana, Ikelocha and Ufele. Of these Enweleana, the youngest, is dominant because it has produced an Eze Nri and had influential leaders.

The number of maximal, major, minor and minimal lineages formed in Agukwu is briefly shown in Table 18, and the population figures for the minimal lineages are shown in Table 21.

### Diodo

According to Nri history, when Nri Namoke migrated from Amanuke to the lake site at Agukwu, he met two groups of people called Achalla and Nsekpe. (See Figure 10). Nri Namoke allied with them and became Eze Nri of Diodo. These three units still keep their identity. Hence there are three maximal lineages in Diodo called Umu Nri Namoke, Umu Nsekpe and Uzo Achalla.<sup>9</sup> At present, however, Umu Nri Namoke and Umu Egbobe, a major segment of Achalla, dominate the politics of Diodo so that one hardly hears of Umu Nsekpe and Uzo Achalla maximal lineages. It is not possible to go into further detail here. The distribution of lineages in Diodo is as shown in Table 19. Table 22 shows the population figures for each minimal lineage in Diodo.

### Akamkpisi

According to Umu Diana oral tradition, the founder of Umu Diana was Ezioye who bore Diana, and he bore Adama who bore Ire. (See Figure 10). Ire bore Ezikanebo and three others. But Ezikanebo

Table 18 Agukwu Lineages

Ward	Ward Section	Founder	Max.	Major	Minor	Min.
Agukwu (Population approx: 7,000)	Agbadana	Onyiora (Umu Onyiora)	1	4	2	11
	Uruoji	Alikenri (Umu Alikenri)	1	4	5	27
	Obeagu	Nribuife (Umu Nribuife)	1	2	—	12
	Total		3	10	7	50

Note: It would be expected that there are more minor lineages than major. This figure shows that lineages do not segment symmetrically or equally.

Table 19 Diodo Lineages

Ward	Founder	Max.	Major	Minor	Min.
Diodo (Population approx. 500)	Nrinamoke	1	—	—	3
	Uzo Achalla	1	3	—	6
	Nsekpe	1	1	1	1
	Total	3	3	1	10

Note: The absence of minor lineages in Diodo reflects the disturbances in lineage segmentation in Diodo. (See genealogy Figure 10).

Table 20 Akamkpisi Lineages

Ward	Ward Section	Founder	Max.	Major	Minor	Min.
Akamkpisi (Population approx. 2,500)	Umu Diana (Adama)	Ezikanebo	1	—	—	1
		Adidi (Ezekwem)	1	1	—	4
		Ebedeako (Emeki)	1	—	—	3
	Ekwenanuka	Nto (Enuora) (Agbana)	1	1	1	5
				1	1	8
	Uruofolo	Ezika Ogbalite	1	—	—	1
		Okpatulu	1	1	2	7
		Adikwanwoke	1	2	2	10
	Total		7	6	6	39

became a prominent leader and founder of a maximal lineage popularly known as Umu Ezikanabo and at times called Umu Diokpala. The lineage became politically dominant over the other three.

In Ekwenanuka the maximal lineages founded by Nto segmented into two major lineages, Umu Ojua and Umu Nnafo.<sup>10</sup> Umu Ojua occupied a discrete territory; its people are called Agbana. Umu Nnafo also occupied a discrete territory; its people are called Enuora. Each has further segments that cannot be included here.

In Uru Ofolo, Umu Ogbalite maximal lineage has only one segment, Ezika, which is structurally a major lineage. Umu Ezika segmented into six minimal lineages, of which only one, Umu Ogwu, is extant. So in this case the minimal lineage is the same as the major lineage, and the same as the maximal lineage in span and depth. Indeed there are only three adult males in that lineage. Thus Umu Ezike Ogbalite is structurally a three-level type that has at present lost its political influence in Nri. It combines with Umu Adikwanwoke which is now dominant over it. Okpatulu maximal lineage has one major segment called Otiwuli, which is segmented into two minor and seven minimal.

Members of Adikwanwoke maximal lineages are said to be immigrants from Enugu-ukwu. They resided close to the maximal lineages of Ezike Ogbalite and Okpatulu. Adikwanwoke segmented into three major lineages, Umu Ugwu, Umu Okpobe and Umu Okeishi. Okeishi was the senior son (*okpala*) but refused to perform his father's mortuary rites, abandoned his heritage and joined Umu Mbe of Obeagu in Agukwu. The other two brothers, Okpobe and Ugwu, jointly performed the rites. The leadership of the maximal lineage was from then determined by the first to take the *ozo* title. The struggle between Umu Ugwu and Umu Okpobe for leadership is discussed in Chapter 8.

The distribution of lineages in Akamkpisi is shown in Table 20, and the population of the minimal lineage is given in Tables 23, 24 and 25.

### **The Status of Temples and their Lineages – Aspects of Equality and Inequality**

Lineage segmentation can occur without temples being formed, but temples can only be formed when lineage segmentation has occurred. The social position and functions associated with lineages

generally determine that of the temples, and these in turn determine the nature and character of political groups that emanate from the lineages that own the temples.

A temple, *obu*, is central in Nri society organization. A socially mature adult Nri man should have a family. He and his family live in a compound. Such a compound may be small, *ngula nta*, or large, *ngulu ukwu*. A traditional compound, which may measure 60yds x 50yds, if it is a large one, is walled around with rectangular mud walls and has two exits. The main entrance is provided with a large gate having wooden doors decorated with *ichi* marks. The compound has a small secret door usually located at the back of the compound. (Plates 33 and 34).

A small compound has one temple, while a big compound has several. A temple is a rectangular building ranging from 30ft x 10ft, for large ones to 6ft x 5ft for small ones. A traditional temple has strong walls and strong vertical logs supporting the roof, which is made of a thick layer of woven leaves. New compounds and temples are, at present, built with cement blocks and roofed with corrugated iron sheets. The temple is situated almost at the middle of the walled compound and usually facing the main entrance.

The owner of the compound sits in his temple and receives visitors and strangers. His sleeping house and those of his wife or wives are generally behind the temple or by its side, and the domestic section of the compound is usually separated from the temple or public section by a short wall or fence with several entrances linking the domestic with the public section of the compound. In the temple there is a raised platform constructed either at the centre or the side. This platform is the ancestor altar, *iru Ndi ichie*. On the altar are various objects related to the ancestor cult. Also inside the temple are various other objects that are either for ritual purposes or for status.

The temple is not a 'sacred' place in the sense that it is a 'holy of holies'. It is part of a man's domestic complex where he stays, relaxes and receives visitors, and ritually communicates with his ancestors (and other supernatural beings associated with the traditional religion) from whom he inherited the temple if he is a first son, or to whom he dedicates the temple if he is not a first son. His first son, *okpala*, by any of his wives will inherit his temple with the surrounding land. The



Plate 33 An entrance to a compound.

owner of the temple is therefore a custodian of a heritage that passes from a father who was a first son to his first son, or from a father to his first son. So the present custodians of lineages and their collective temples are persons who are the descendants of the first sons of the founder of the lineages – inheritance from generation to generation by primogeniture. But, as shown above, other factors can alter the status of lineages that are founded by first sons, and this alters the rule of primogeniture to the rule of seniority in the *ozo* title.

On the other hand, the temple is 'sacred' in the sense that in the past, to avoid pollution, certain types of women and men were not allowed to enter into temples. But this ritual avoidance, *nso*, has been abrogated by Eze Nri.

As one enters the compound of a titled man one comes across ritual shrines such as *ebo*, *chi*, *Anyanwu*, *Agbala* and *Ana* (discussed in Chapter 3). The temple is the centre from where the owner controls the ritual, economic, social, political and domestic life of his family, if it is a small compound, or of the lineage if it is a big compound. But it is



Plate 34 A temple, obu.



the political significance of the temples that is generally uppermost in the minds of the Nri traditional elite, the *ozo*-titled men.

Lineages are ranked in order of formation and political importance from the minimal to the maximal. Lineages segment in every descending generation. At various loci of segmentation, that is at the apex of the segments, temples are established and dedicated to founding ancestors. The founder of the temple is regarded as a great ancestor; *ichie ukwu*, which means he held the *ozo* title. The lineages that were derived from this ancestor are named after him. Thus in Agukwu (Figure 9), Onyiora was a great ancestor. His temple is called Obu Onyiora and all the members of the lineages that attend the temple are called Umu Onyiora, the children of Onyiora. First sons, *okpala*, inherit these temples and are the custodians who hold the *ofo-okpala*, the staff of authority held by first sons. The chief priest of the temple of any lineage is the first *ozo*-titled man, called *isi nze*, of the lineage, irrespective of who is the inheritor and custodian. During political or ritual activities members of lineages associated with the temple congregate in the temple. The *ozo* man presides or performs the ritual and offerings. The meat, food and drink used are shared according to set rules, since this type of sharing reflects the status and power of lineage members. The inheritor and custodian of the temple takes a customary portion of the meat sacrificed. This act is called *ife nru*, meaning 'paying homage with tribute'. The other portions are divided according to seniority in the *ozo* title or according to the seniority among non-titled men, *okolobia*. If there is no *ozo* man in the lineage then the senior man in the *okolobia* group of the lineage officiates or presides. If the custodian of the temple is also the first to take the *ozo* title, he presides and takes the *ife nru* and the share also due to him as an *ozo* man. In some temples, shares are taken according to the seniority of lineages, while in the majority of them they are taken according to seniority in the *ozo* title and in the *okolobia* group.

Since in Nri the internal power politics of the various hierarchies of lineages are centred around the struggle for leadership within and between temples associated with some of the lineages in the hierarchies, I will analyse the formation of these temples in Agukwu, Diodo and Akamkpisi and isolate their status structurally and function-

ally. The type of power struggle in which they are involved, and the nature of authority exercised, is analysed in Chapter 8.

### Agukwu

As summarized in Table 21, Agukwu has six levels of temples hierarchically arranged to reflect the relative chronological order of their formation in the genealogy, and their seniority in terms of time.

In the first level only the temple of Uga was formed. It was the temple of Eri, in Aguleri about twenty-six miles north-west of Nri. All successors to the throne of Eze Nri must visit the temple of Uga during the coronation ceremony to perform the rituals of presentation, re-enactment and integration.

At the second level is the temple of Nri Ifikuanim. All Agukwu congregate for ritual or political activity in this temple. The political unity of Agukwu is symbolized and expressed in terms of the *ofo* of Nri Ifikuanim, which was inherited by Alikenri and kept in perpetual custody in the temple of Nri Ifikuanim-Alikenri.

Three temples occur at the third level. The order of seniority, considering the age of the founders, would have been Onyiora, Alikenri and Ogbuo. But, as discussed above, changes that took place resulted in the alteration of the status of lineages formed at this level, and this affected the status of the temples associated with the lineages. Thus Alikenri, who took the *ozo* title before Onyiora, the first son, inherited the temple and the *ofo-ozo* staff of Nri Ifikuanim. Onyiora as first son inherited the *ofo-ana* staff. It was Ogbuo's right to be Nri but he died. So Nribuife, the youngest son of Ogbuo, took the title of Nri and later unified the town of Nri.

There are, therefore, three major power blocs in Agukwu. The Agbadana lineages hold the *ofo-ana* staff, which is associated with *ana-Agukwu*, the earth cult. The Uruoji lineages hold the *ofo-ozo*, also called *ofo-okpala*, a staff that represents the political and ritual authority associated with the *ozo* title of Nri Ifikuanim. The head of all *ozo* men, called *Isi Nze* of Uruoji, gives *ofo* to all persons who want it in Agukwu. The leadership of the royal descent group is controlled by the Umu Nri Obeagu lineages. Kingship rotates among the youngest major lineages of the three maximal lineages. The *Ofo-Nri Menri*, which is the state

Table 21 The Formation of Agukwu Collective Temples, *Obu*

FIRST LEVEL OF OBU	SECOND LEVEL OF OBU	THIRD LEVEL OF OBU	FORTH LEVEL OF OBU	FIFTH LEVEL OF OBU	SIXTH LEVEL OF OBU	EXISTING MINIMAL OBU	NUMBER OF ADULT MALES	NUMBER OF WIVES	NUMBER OF CHILDREN	TOTAL
OBU UGA (AGULERI)	NRI (FIKUANIM)	ALIKENRI (URUOJI VILLAGE)	ANUTA	UHO MUTA (ANWUA)	UFO	UFO	20	27	50	97
					EKWENSI	EKWENSI	29	23	70	122
				AGUOLUANNUTA	AGUOLUANNUTA	AGUOLUANNUTA	26	24	58	108
					ABANA UKAM	ABANA UKAM	69	58	264	391
				NRI ALIKE	AGUOLUENWE	AGUOLUENWE				
			ESONA		ECHETA	ECHETA	58	53	188	299
				AGUOBELE	AGUOBELE	AGUOBELE				
					EZEKWE	EZEKWE	20	17	41	78
				ONYEDIKE	NWINE	NWINE	24	14	87	125
					OGBUAGWO	OGBUAGWO	10	14	41	65
		NRIEBUZO	NRIAPIA	MPE	NRIAPIA	NRIAPIA	9	9	18	36
					NRIAKA	NRIAKA	17	31	76	124
					EGBE	EGBE	17	23	30	70
					NWANKPO	NWANKPO	16	19	46	81
					EDUPUTA	EDUPUTA	6	7		13
					OGINI	OGINI	7	5	7	19
			NWADUNO		NWADUNO	NWADUNO	5	8	30	43
					AGUOCHE	AGUOCHE	10	12	67	87
					NRIILI	NRIILI	19	13	29	51
			UKABIA		UKABIA	AGBALAKA	9	6	15	30
					OKPANWAPO	OKPANWAPO	30	30	106	166
		NRIOMALO			OKPAOLI	OKPAOLI	5	7	39	51
					AGBA	AGBA	6	9	16	31
					OKOTE	OKOTE	7	4	8	19
					NWERI	ALIKEOGALANYA	40	41	140	221
						ALIKE OBELE	20	16	20	56
			EBEDIKE		NRIEME	NRIEME	26	26	26	78
					EBEDIKE	EBEDIKE	10	16	51	77
					OBELENRI	OBELENRI	12	14	23	49
					UKE		2	8	30	40
					AYOGWU	AYOGWU	120	82	85	287
	ONYIORA (AGBADANI VILLAGE)	AGU-ONYA			OGO (NO OBU)	WOGWU				
					OMARU (NO OBU)					
					(M) DIEGE ELEM	EZEAMA	33	42	134	209
					DIEGE OBOSI	DIEGE OBOSI				
					DIEGE MKPUTA	DIEGE MKPUTA	6	10	12	28
		ODILI (NO OBU)	NRIJIOFO		(M) AYIKA	AYIKA	63	48	70	181
					NRIEWENETEM	NRIEWENETEM	13	20	47	80
					OGBONNAMA	OGBONNAMA				
					MKPADIGBO	MKPADIGBO	6	6	32	44
					ANDINUNO	ANDINUNO	8	12	50	70
	NRI BUFE (OBEAGU VILLAGE)	URUANUTA (NO OBU)			AWANA	AWANA	23	2	128	172
					OGUOCHAJA	ACHUOCHAJA	12	19	15	46
					NRIAKA (ONU)	NRIAKA	28	30	50	108
					ABANANWARA	ABANANWARA	38	43	141	222
					OGBOO	OCHOGWU / O	53	58	182	292
		OGBOO			OCHOGWU / N	OCHOGWU / N	60	88	189	337
					OGBOO (MBE)	OKATU				
					(M) EWUOCHA	EWUOCHA				
					NRIENWELEANI	NRIENWELEANI				
					IKEOCHA	IKEOCHA				
		EZEKAMMADU			UFELE	UFELE				
					NWAEBI	NWAEBI	2	3	4	9
					OKANA	OKANA	2	5	6	13
	(M) NRI BUFE				ATUNANDUZO	ATUNANDUZO	79	39	103	221
					NRI ANWA	NRI ANWA	8	16	35	59

Note (M) → Temple moved to a lower level

← (M) Temple moved up to a higher level

staff of political and ritual authority, and the *Alo-Nri Menri*, the state staff of political and ritual power, circulate amongst these royal descent groups. Similarly, royal leadership circulates among lineages of Agbadana, Uruoji and Obeagu, although it is centred on Umu Nri Obeagu (see Figure 12). The power struggle that these power groups generate is discussed in Chapter 8.

In Uruoji, the *okpala* of the Umu Ufo minimal lineages of umu Anuta major lineage are the custodians of the temple of Nri Ifikuanim and that of Alikenri by virtue of the rule of primogeniture. Umu Ufo or Uho are therefore the keepers of the *oko-okpala* of Alikenri, for the whole of Uruoji, and of the *oko-ozo* of Nri Ifikuanim, for all Agukwu. But the custodian of the temple of Nri Ifikuanim-Alikenri only holds the *oko-okpala* of Alikenri or Uruoji, while the head of the *ozo*-titled men in Uruoji controls it. If the custodian of the temple of Nri-Ifikuanim-Alikenri is also the head of the *ozo*-titled men, *isi nze*, of Uruoji, such a person controls tremendous political power and authority in Uruoji and in Agukwu as a whole. If on the other hand the custodian and the *isi nze* are different persons, a considerable amount of political conflict is generated, because the *isi nze*, who in this case belongs to another lineage, has to perform his role as *isi nze* of both Uruoji and Agukwu in the collective temple of Nri Ifikuanim-Alikenri, which is under the custodianship of the *okpala* lineage of Umu Uho or Ufo. Indeed, since 1920, these two offices have been assumed by two persons of different lineages and have generated one of the hottest political power struggles recorded in the annals of Nri history.

The significance of the three power blocs in Agukwu is symbolically re-enacted in the method of sharing. Thus, if the whole of Agukwu gathers to sacrifice in the *ana* cult of Agukwu, under the custodianship of Agbadana, the *okpala* maximal lineage, the taking of shares is as follows: Agbadana takes first, then Uruoji and then Obeagu. If the sacrifice is in the temple of Nri Ifikuanim-Alikenri, and all Agukwu are involved, the taking of shares is Uruoji first, then Agbadana and then Obeagu. If the sacrifice is made in the temple of *Nri Menri* in Eze Nri's palace, Uruoji and Obeagu take one share and Agbadana takes the other. In this respect the seniority of the lineages and temples is contextual.

Temples that are formed at the fourth level are

collective temples of major lineages. In Uruoji, Umu Alikenri, the order of seniority of the temples would have been Ukabia, Anuta, Esona, Nri Ebuzo and Nri Omalo. But after the ostracism of Ukabia the order became Anuta, Esona, Nri Ebuzo and Nri Omalo. Ukabia's temple became subordinate not only to Anuta but also to that of his junior brother, Nri Ebuzo. Members of Ukabia lineages had in the past made several attempts to regain the former status of their lineage and temple and failed. The most recent attempt was between 1940 and 1967.

In Umu Onyiora, Agbadana, the seniority based on age of the founder is rigidly maintained, thus: Ebedike, Aguonya, Anuta, Akpaka and Nrijofo. But at present the temple of Aguonya overshadows that of Ebedike, which is attached to Aguonya because it lacked the manpower to stand as an independent major lineage and temple.

In Umu Nribuife Obeagu, the status of the temple is as follows: Umu Nri, Umu Ezekamadu, Abananwara, Mbe, Ochogu. The senior son Abananwara is the holder of *oko-okpala* and so the temple of Ogboo. But here the royal temple of Nribuife has surpassed the others. Hence Umu Nri is regarded as senior.

Formerly, all descendants of Ogboo lineages excluding Umu Nribuife proper, called Umu Nri Obeagu, attended the temple of Ogboo. After a quarrel in about 1910, Umu Ochogu and Umu Mbe lineages established separate temples. But up to this day the royal temple of Nribuife held by Umu Nri Obeagu symbolizes the unity of the whole of Obeagu.

The figures attached to Table 21 show the range in the population size of the minimal lineages associated with minimal temples. These variations affect the breaking and merging of lineages, and to some extent determine the nature of the political struggle that occurs in leadership situations within and between lineages that own and attend one temple. This type of temple politics is examined in Chapter 8, so here an example of such an on-going process will suffice. The Umu Ochogu lineages are two big segments called Ochogu Obele and Ochogu Nnekwu. In 1971 they had a population of about 292 and 337 persons respectively. The status of Umu Ochogu lineage has shifted from its original sister's son's lineage, *Nwadiala*, to a minimal lineage that now assumes the status of a major lineage. At the

Table 22. The Formation of Diodo Collective Temples

First Level	Second Level	Third Level	Fourth Level	Existing/ Minimal/ Obus	Number of Adult Males	Number of Wives	Number of Children	Total
Nri Namoke		Nrinamoke		Nrinamoke	14	20	48	82
		Okpe		Okpe	10	12	27	49
		Anwa		Anwa	15	14	33	62
Nsekpe				Nsekpe	3	3	7	13
	Achala	Echekwube		Echekwube	2	2	2	6
		Nwaofia		Nwaofia	3	2	8	13
		Egbobe	Maduagu	Maduagu	15	20	54	89
			Azivam	Azivam	15	21	80	116
			Mmuta	Mmuta/Obanyili	4	4	21	29
			Obelo	Obelo	9	13	35	57

Table 23. The Formation of Umu Diana Collective Temples

First Level	Second Level	Third Level	Fourth Level	Fifth Level	Existing/ Minimal Obus	No. of Adult Males	No. of Wives	No. of Children	Total
Diana (Eziroye)	Adidi (Umueze-kwe)	Akpagu			Akpagu	10	7	27	44
		Nduka Ukwatu	Dim		Dim	4	8	13	25
			Nduka Enwe		Nduka Enwe	5	5	9	19
			Nduka Ukwatu		Nduka Ukwatu	21	24	60	105
	Ezikanebo (Umudiok-pala)				Ezikanebo	4	6	20	30
	Ebedeako (Emue-meka)	Bosiogu			Bosiogu	5	5	15	25
		Kwima			Migrated				
		Nore			Nore	3	5	10	18

Table 24. The Formation of Agbana and Enuora Collective Temples

First Level	Second Level	Third Level	Fourth Level	Fifth Level	Sixth Level	Existing Minimal Obus	No. of Adult Males	No. of Wives	No. of Children	Total
Nto	Ojua (Agbani) Village	Ekebo				Ekebo	13	9	78	110
		Ota				Ota	1	3	10	14
		Ekwo	Ezikaonyili	Eme		Eme	9	15	52	76
				Ndaebo		Ndaebo	15	14	52	61
				Anowudo		Anowudo	14	14	70	98
				Duno		Duno	2	6	10	18
				Dueze		Dueze	16	24	35	75
				Omudofu		Omudofu	4	6	23	33
	Nnafo Enuora Village	Adigbe				Adigbe	26	20	84	130
		Ngwo	Mgbanyili			Mgbanyili	10	6	14	30
			Akabike			Akabike	25	27	74	126
			Uzu			Uzu	7	9	15	31
		Ezealo				Ezealo	24	24	75	123



Table 25. The Formation of Uru Ofolo Collective Temples

First Level	Second Level	Third Level	Fourth Level	Fifth Level	Existing Minimal Obu	Number of Adult Males	Number of Wives	Number of Children	Total
Okpatulu	Oriwuli	Ezealibu Ijem		Akpuoke	Akpuoke	5	20	20	45
			Akpuoke	Ezealibu	Ezealibu	7	13	40	60
			Anado		Anado	4	7	15	26
			Akpaebi		Akpaebi	4	20	20	44
	Onyedika	Onyedika			Onyedika				
			Akilim		Aklim	9	24	35	68
			Ugweche		Ugweche				
	Adikwan-woke	Ugwu		Agwubuike	Agwubuike				
			Nwausa	Ogba Nwansa	Ogba Nwansa	24	28	56	108
			Ajagwu		Ajagwu	16	12	36	64
			Nwaku		Nwaku	15	19	30	64
		Okpobe		Ezeudu	Ezeudu				
			Anyagbo	Ozumba	Ozumba	10	20	100	130
				Orimkpu	Orimkpu	10	20	50	76
			Nwakugwu		Nwakugwu	17	14	22	53
			Adikwa		Adikwa	15	25	92	132
			Okpobe Ntumele		Ntumele	45	39	105	189
	Ogbalite	Ezika	Nnogo	Extinct					
			Ogbunoye	Extinct					
			Alekwe	Extinct					
			Ogulu	Extinct					
			Onwugbute		Onwugbute	3	13	21	37

beginning of this century they attended the temple of Ogboo, controlled by Umu Abananwara. By 1910 they had decided to break off and attend a separate temple of their father, Ogboo Ochogu, who was the reincarnation of his mother's father and the progenitor of Ochogu Nnekwu and Ochogu Obele. These two units have stuck together because of the influence and prestige the lineages have in Agukwu and Nri politics. But there is always the threat of the unit splitting. This is evident in a recent crisis in Umu Ochogu between the traditional elite and the new elite.

### Diodo

Table 22 summarizes the formation and status of temples in Diodo. The temples of Nri Namoke and Nsekpe occur at the first level. But politically the temple of Nri Namoke is dominant because it is a collective temple associated with the title of Eze Nri and has several other lineages attached to it. The leader of this temple gives *ofo* to anyone who requires it in Diodo. The temple of Nsekpe, although it had only three living adults of which only one was married and childless in 1968, yet has considerable influence because it is associ-

ated with a powerful cult called *udo okpala*.

At the second level the temple of Achalla emerges. It is a collective temple for three lineages of Diodo. The custodianship of this temple is shared between Umu Echekwube and Umu Nwaofia lineages that have been eclipsed by Umu Egbobe. Amongst these three, the Egbobe temple is politically dominant, but it is constantly plagued by the difficulty of keeping together the seven lineages, each with its temples, whose members attend the temple of Egbobe.

### Akamkpisi

Akamkpisi is made up of Umu Diana, Agbana, Enuora and Uru Ofolo, which is a large and heterogeneous group. I briefly deal with each unit.

#### Umu Diana

The senior temple of the whole of Umu Diana is Obu Umu Diana, followed by temples of Adidi (Umu Ezekwe), Ezikanebo (Umu Diokpala) and Ebedeako (Umu Emeka) (see Table 23). But the temple of Ezikanebo is dominant in the whole of Akamkpisi, for its head is also recognized as the *ofo*-giver to all Akamkpisi. It is also closely associated with the temple of Umu Diana where

the coronation of Eze Nri takes place. Lineages attached to the temple supply Eze Nri with officers of the Eze's inner chamber and they alone have the prerogative to touch, crown, serve and bury any Eze Nri. The temple is also associated with the function of performing the cleansing of great abominations related to Eze Nri and some categories of abominations related to Nri town.

At the third level two temples occur, Akpagu and Nduka Ukwatu, of which the latter is dominant. In the past, Umu Akpagu attended Nduka's temple, but after a recent quarrel Akpagu claimed its autonomy and only time will tell whether it can stand alone without leaning on Nduka Ukwatu. Similarly, the Nore and Bosiogu lineages are each claiming seniority over one another and control of Ebedeako's temple. The temple of Kwima lineage still stands but is of no political consequence in Umu Diana since all its members migrated *en masse* to Abacha, a neighbouring town, in the latter part of the last century. This migration of minimal lineages from Nri to other Igbo towns is a very old behaviour pattern – it is one of the factors that contributed to keeping under check the population of Nri in relation to its territorial extent.

#### Agbana and Enuora

Nto lineages moved away from Umu Diana and became territorially independent. The temple of Nto was founded and it is at present regarded as subordinate to that of Ezikanebo from which it was supposed to have segmented. Nto segmented into two lineages, Ojua and Nnafo, which moved apart, each occupying discrete territories, and founded two temples named after them (see Table 24). The leadership of the temple of Nto is vested in the *isi nze* or the head of the *okolobia* in the absence of an *isi nze*. But the political importance of the temple of Nto is small and this may be attributed to the movement. Instead, the temples of Ojua and Nnafo that were formed out of Nto, and which occur at the second level, are of great political significance because they are collective temples of a major lineage with many minimal lineages.

At the third level three temples occur: Ekwo, Otar and Ekebe. The temple of Ekwo is also the temple of Ezikaonyili. Ekwo is dominant over the temples of Otar and Ekebo. Similarly, Ngwo is politically dominant over Adigbe and Ezealo.

#### Uru Ofolo

Three lineages of Umu Diana moved apart and formed independent territorial units some centuries ago. They were Nto, Ogbalite and Okpatulu. Ogbalite and Okpatulu were later joined by Adikwanwoke. These three lineages, called Uru Ofolo, have very interesting power structures which are reflected in the relationship of their temples. The three temples are subordinate to the temple of Ezikanebo of Umu Diana, whose leader gives *ofa* to any person in Umu Diana, Enuora, Agbana and Uru Ofolo. Ogbalite and Okpatulu claim seniority over Adikwanwoke when all congregate at the temple of Ezikanebo for any purpose. But each temple is independent of the other.

Okpatulu claims seniority over Ezika Ogbalite and Adikwanwoke. This claim is only theoretical since Okpatulu is not a collective temple attended by the other two. Even among the lineages that attend the temple of Okpatulu, quarrels about how to divide shares in certain property connected with Okpatulu lineages caused a split, so that in 1972 only members of Onyedika temple attended Okpatulu's temple, while Ezealibu Ijem lineages attended Otiwuli. Below Ezealibu and Onyedika, the temples that occur are associated with minor and minimal lineages.

Ezika Ogbalite has only one temple. Many lineages became extinct and the present custodian of the Ogbalite temple is a man with two adult children. Although it is a temple without manpower, it is associated with an important cult, Ajana, which is a powerful 'earth' cult connected with mortuary rites performed by women of Akamkpisi whose husbands are deceased.

Umu Adikwanwoke lineage had three segments, Okeishi, Okpoke and Ugwu with one temple. The leadership struggle in this temple is one of the fiercest in Nri because it has resulted in the dramatic grouping and regrouping of lineages in Akamkpisi.

#### Groupings of Lineages based on Ritual Role Differentiation

In this section I deal with the various traditional roles vested in the lineages or group of lineages. The autonomy and solidarity of each ward in Nri is expressed in various ways, principally by the interdependence of the ritual roles of the component lineages of each ward.

In Nri a year is called *aro*. In the past Eze Nri

Table 26 Nri (Igbo) Traditional Lunar Calendar

MOON MONTH (ONWA)	RITUAL CEREMONY (E MME)	ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES	EQUIVALENT IN ROMAN CALENDAR IN 1967
ONWA AGUMAARO THE MOON FOR COUNTING THE YEAR	EZENRI AGU ARO EZE NRI ANNOUNCES THE YEAR	TRADING	IGUARO IS FIXED ANY DAY AFTER NEW MOON IN FEBRUARY Eg 1966 13 <sup>th</sup> FEB. 1967 11 <sup>th</sup> FEB
ONWA MBU 1 <sup>st</sup> MOON		FARM CLEARING	LATE FEB—MARCH
ONWA ABUO 2 <sup>nd</sup> MOON		CLEARING, RIDGING AND PLANTING OF YAM, MAIZE AND CASSAVA	MARCH — APRIL
ONWA IFE EKE 3 <sup>rd</sup> MOON	EKE RITUAL AND FESTIVAL (Done in Eke Market)	PLANTING CONTINUES (Ogani Abial) HUNGER PERIOD COMES	APRIL — MAY
ONWA ANO 4 <sup>th</sup> MOON		PLANTING SEED YAMS (AWAJI)	MAY — JUNE
ONWA AGWU 5 <sup>th</sup> MOON FOR AGWU	MMANWU ABUA ADULT MASOGRADERS APPEAR 100CHI UMUNWOKO OFFERING TO MEN'S CHI	WEEDING HARVESTING EARLY MAIZE	JUNE — JULY 1 <sup>st</sup> MASOGRADES APPEARED 9 <sup>th</sup> JUNE 1967
ONWA IFEJIOKU (6 <sup>th</sup> MOON) MOON FOR IFEJIOKU	1 OFFERING TO WOMEN'S CHI 2 YAM RITUAL — IFEJIOKU 3 IRU OTITE — YAM HARVEST	WEEDING AND YAM TENDING FIRST YAM HARVEST FOR NMUO ONLY	JULY — AUGUST
ONWA ALUMJI (7 <sup>th</sup> MOON) MOON FOR ALL ALUSI	YAM HARVEST RITUAL FOR ALUSI ONLY	SECOND YAM HARVEST FOR ALUSI ONLY	AUGUST — SEPTEMBER
ONWA ILO MMUO (8 <sup>th</sup> MOON) MOON FOR OFFERING TO MMUO	RITUAL OF YAM HARVEST OFFERING TO ALL SPIRITS MMUO	YAM HARVEST FOR MEN (OGANI ANA): HUNGER PERIOD GOES	EARLY SEP — OCTOBER
ONWA ANA (9 <sup>th</sup> MOON) FOR ANA	ANA (EARTH FORCED) RITUAL (OKIKE SCHEDULED)	ROPE MAKING AND VARIOUS ACTIVITIES	EARLY OCT — NOVEMBER
ONWA OKIKE (10 <sup>th</sup> MOON) MOON FOR OKIKE	CREATION OF UMUNNAS OKIKE RITUAL	TYING OF YAMS IN BARN	EARLY NOV — DECEMBER
ONWA AJANA NA EDEAJA (11 <sup>th</sup> MOON) FOR AJANA & EDEAJA	AJANA (SENIOR EARTH FORCE) AND EDEAJA HARVEST	COCOVAM HARVEST	EARLY DEC — JANUARY
ONWA UZO ALUSI (12 <sup>th</sup> MOON) FOR ALUSI	OFFERING TO ALUSI	TRADING	EARLY JAN — EARLY FEB

had the sole prerogative of declaring the close of the old year and proclaiming the beginning of a new year for all Igbo settlements under his hegemony. This ceremony is still performed today in a modified form. It is carried out after the first new moon, as seen by the chief priests of Nri, after the ritual of *uzo Alusi* which is the last ritual in the Nri lunar calendar. The ceremony is now fixed at every second Saturday of February.

The Nri year is divided according to the phase of the new moon. Each lunar month has a name, a ritual associated with it and also an economic activity specifically connected with it. Table 26 clarifies how a year was divided in 1967 — this is typical. Once the year is announced each of the three wards of the town begin to perform the ritual and economic activities associated with each month according to the calculation made and announced by the *Ndi Nze*, a state council (see Chapter 7). Lineages or groups of lineages of each ward perform the specific function tradit-

ionally assigned to them. The orderliness of the wards and state of Nri and the hegemony in the past depended on how well each group performed the rituals associated with each month. The success of the coming year largely depends on the success of this year. This depends on two processes: correct observance of the rituals and taboos, which order and control the lives of the people of Nri and those within its sphere of influence, and the orderly performance of the economic activities associated with services, trade and market, farming and local domestic industries.

The arrangements that follow the performance of such rituals, especially those associated with the markets and farming, generate political activity between lineages. If a lineage delays in performing its duty a general alarm is raised. Some lineages even use this delaying tactic as an instrument for scoring political points. But such delay triggers off counter action. Lineages, or groups of lineages of each ward, are assigned different ritual roles.

Table 27  
Role Chart  
for Agukwu

SIGNS	ROLES	LINEAGES ASSUMING THE ROLES															
	MINIMAL LINEAGE (OGBU)	UFO UWENSI ANUTA ABIANA UKAM AGBOLU ENWE AGBOLE EZEKWEI OGUAGWO NRANKPO NRIBUIFE NRANKPO NR															

*Agukwu*

The different roles played by the various lineages are partly derived from Nri history and partly a result of power struggles between and within lineages. Table 27 shows the major distribution of ritual roles among lineages that make up Agukwu. The basic principle followed in the distribution, according to Nri people, was laid down during and after the reign of Nri Ifikuanim.

























The estate and statuses of Nri Ifikuanim were divided among his three dominant children, Alikeni, Onyiora and Ogbuo, who transmitted them patrilineally to their descendants. The division ran thus: Alikeni inherited the custodianship of the temple and the *ofo nze* of Nri Ifikuanim, the priesthood of the supernatural beings associated

with the *Oye* market, and the *Onu ebo* and *Okike* cults of all Agukwu. Onyiora, the first son, inherited the *Ofo ana* which is closely associated with the earth cult of Agukwu called *Ana Agukwu*, the priesthood of the cult of the yam, *Ifejioke*, and the priesthood of *Iyi Azi*, the supernatural being associated with the *Afo* market. Ogbuo inherited the right to take the Nri title, the priesthood of the supernatural beings associated with the *Nkwo* market and the *Eke* market cults, the priesthood of the year cult, *Aro*, and the cult of the soil-of-the-earth, *Ajana*.

These roles are distributed among the lineages of each maximal lineages thus: in Uruoji, Umu Ufo minimal lineage is the keeper of the temple and *ofo* of Nri Ifikuanim. The *Isi Nze* of Uruoji is the



Table 28 Role Chart for Diodo

SIGNS	ROLES	LINE AGE(S) ASSUMING THE ROLES									
	MINIMAL LINEAGE OBU	NSERPE	ANWA	OKPE	NRINAMOKO	MADUAGU	AZIVAM	MNUTA	DBELO	NWAOPIA	E.CHEKWIBE
	MAJOR LINEAGE OBU	NRINAMOKO				ACHALLA					
	MAXIMAL LINEAGE OBU	NSERPE									
	AFA	OIOOO									
	OFO										
	ANA	PRIESTHOOD BY VOCATION — ALL THOSE ORDAINED									
	AJANA										
	IDEMILI	PRIESTHOOD BY VOCATION — ALL THOSE ORDAINED									
	UDO OKPALA										
	IFEJIOKU										
	NZE	ISI NZE									
	OGBO	ISI-OGBO				ISI OGBO					
	AFO NSHI						(OCCASIONAL)				
	NkwO NSHI						(OCCASIONAL)				
	OGUGU NSHI						(OCCASIONAL)				
	NRI						OBSOLETE				

chief priest of all the supernatural beings of Agukwu which are under the custodianship of Uruoji such as *Anwoye*, *Onuebo*. In Agbadana, the major lineages of Aguonya and Nrijioko and Ebedike share in rotation the priesthood of the Agukwu earth-cult, *Ana*. Uruanuta minimal lineage is in charge of the *Afo* market cult, *Iyi Azi*, and the major lineage Umu Akpaka is the custodian of the yam-cult, *Ifejioku*, of Agukwu. In Obeagu the *Isi Nze* is the chief priest of the *Eke* cult and *Ajana* cult of Agukwu, and the minimal lineage of Umu Mbe is the custodian of the *Aro* and *Nkwo* cults. The maximal lineages also express their solidarity

by owning common cults, which are in the custody of the *Isi Nze*.

The whole of Agukwu has one common *ozo* title association headed by the first man to take the *ozo* title in Agukwu. Similarly they organize their age-grades together and each age-grade has a leader called *isi ogboo*.

#### Diodo

The solidarity of Diodo is also expressed in the interdependence of the roles performed by the various lineages for the welfare of Diodo. Table 28 sums up the present situation. Umu Nri

Table 29 Role Chart for Akamkpisi

SIGNS	ROLES	LINEAGES ASSUMING THE ROLES																																							
	MINIMAL LINEAGES OBU	BOSCELA	OWHAE	NOR	ANAGOL	DIM	OWHAE	OWHAE	OWHAE	OWHAE	OWHAE	OWHAE	OWHAE	OWHAE	OWHAE	OWHAE	OWHAE	OWHAE	OWHAE	OWHAE																					
	MAJOR LINEAGES OBU	EBEDEAKO					O OJOA					NNAFO					EZEALIBU					ONYEDINA					EZIKA					UGWU					OKPOBE				
	MAXIMAL LINEAGES OBU	DIANA (EZIDYE)					NTO										OTIWULI OKPATULI					OGBA-LITE					ADIKWANWOKE														
	AFA	A K					A M										K P					I					S I														
	OFO																																								
	ANA	1 <sup>st</sup> TO INITIATE, OFFICIATES					(PARTICIPANTS)					— PART					I C I P A N T S )																								
	ISUBENSO																																								
	AJANA																																								
	IFEJIOKWU	I S I					N Z E																																		
	ARD	1 <sup>st</sup> TO INITIATE, OFFICIATES					(PARTICIPANTS)					— PART					I C I P A N T S )																								
	ANWOYE																																								
	UDO																																								
	NGENE DOKPA																																								
	EKE																																								
	NKWO AFO																																								
	AFO NKWO																																								
	IKPU ALU																																								
	ICHBE NRI																																								

patrilineages that have both the status of a maximal and minimal lineage are the custodians of the temple of Nri Namoke, and as the keepers of that temple their head gives *ofo* to any Diodo man who requires it. The *Okike*, *Ebo*, *Afo*, *Nkwo*, *Ogugu* and *Ifejioku* cults of Diodo are also controlled by the Umu Nri Namoke lineages.

The custodian of the earth cult, *Ana*, of Diodo is a group of Diodo men who are members of the various Diodo lineages and who have performed the ritual of ordination connected with the cult. The first to carry out the ritual is the leader. Umu Nwofia and Umu Echikwu minor lineages control the cult of *Ajana* for the whole of Diodo. The chief priest of *Udo Okpala* cult comes from the maximal and minimal lineage of Nsekpe. The control of the lake and river cult called *Idemmili* is in the hands of a priesthood drawn from any person from Diodo lineages who has undergone the initiation and ordination ceremony.

Since the whole of Diodo has one *ozo* alliance

group, the head of the *Isi Nze* is he who takes the *ozo* title first. Similarly the heads of the various age-grades in Diodo are persons who have taken the *Isi Ogbuo* title first. The struggle for the leadership of these various groups and cults is the main feature of Diodo inter-lineage and intra-lineage politics.

### Akamkpisi

It has been previously stated that the core lineage of Akamkpisi was Umu Diana. Enuora, Agbana, Ezika Ogbalite and Okpatulu were formerly segments that moved away from Umu Diana and became territorially autonomous and gradually grew into bigger units. Later on the lineages of Adikwanwoke were attached to Ezika Ogbalite and Okpatulu. The distribution of roles amongst these units seems to validate the claim that these segments moved away from Umu Diana. Table 29 summarizes the present role distribution in Akamkpisi.

Table 30 The Meaning of Igbo Words in Tables 27, 28 and 29

<i>Afa</i>	Name of 'wards'
<i>Ajana</i>	An aspect of the 'earth' as a supernatural force related to death rites.
<i>Ana</i>	An aspect of the 'earth' as a supernatural force.
<i>Aro</i>	The 'year' as a supernatural force.
<i>Anwoye</i>	A market cult supernatural being.
<i>Eke</i>	A market cult supernatural being.
<i>Idemili</i>	The 'lake' supernatural being.
<i>Ifejoku</i>	The 'yam' supernatural force.
<i>Ichibe Nri</i>	Coronation of Eze Nri.
<i>Isube Nso</i>	Abrogation of taboo.
<i>Ikpu alu</i>	Purification of abomination.
<i>Iyi azi</i>	A supernatural being.
<i>Ngene Diokpa</i>	A supernatural being.
<i>Nkwo</i>	A market cult supernatural being.
<i>Nri</i>	The title 'Nri'.
<i>Nze</i>	The <i>ozo</i> title.
<i>Obu</i>	The temple.
<i>Ofo</i>	Political-ritual staff of authority.
<i>Ogbo</i>	Age-grade.
<i>Ogugu</i>	A supernatural being.
<i>Onuebo</i>	A supernatural being of titled men.
<i>Oye</i>	A market cult supernatural being.
<i>Udo</i>	A very powerful supernatural force.

The Umu Diana lineages hold the temple of Diana and Ezikanebo and so the *ofo*. They give *ofo* to any person in Akamkpisi. They also provide the chief priests in charge of the cults, *Udo*, *Ana*, *Aro*, *Eke*, *Nkwo* and *Afo*. They are also in charge of performing the ritual of purification and the abrogation of breaches of some taboos in Akamkpisi and Nri. They appoint the officers to serve in the inner chamber of Eze Nri from among their members. They crown, serve and bury all Eze Nri.

The minimal lineage of Umu Ezealo of Enuora major lineage looks after the *Alusi* called the *Ngene Diokpa* cult. Agbana looks after the *Anwoye* cult which is associated with the *Oye* market. The *isi nze* of Umu Diana, Agbana and Enuora is the chief priest of the *Ifejoku* farm cult. The maximal lineage of Ezika Ogbalite controls the *Ajana* cult.

The above description of ritual role distribution in Agukwu, Diodo and Akamkpisi substantiates the claim made in the section on the territorial organization of Nri that earlier on these units were independent and politically autonomous settlements. The solidarity and autonomy of each settlement was, and still is, expressed in each unit having its *ofo*, *Ana* and other *Alusi* like *Onu ebo*, the four market supernatural beings *Eke*, *Oya*, *Afo*

and *Nkwo*, a common name and a common founding ancestor. These are the symbols that mark out a settlement as an autonomous political unit in the Igbo culture area.<sup>11</sup> If such a settlement grows independently as a political unit it becomes a town. Such single unit towns are rare in the Igbo culture area. Generally, independent and autonomous settlements have joined together and federated into bigger units, forming the present towns in the Igbo culture area.<sup>12</sup>

Settlements federate in various ways. In the Nri case the original three settlements were unified by Nribuife after the introduction of what became the Nri title system by two independent immigrant groups, followed by a series of marriage alliances and crises of kingship in Diodo. After unification the three units passed through a painful period. Today the three are unified under the kingship of Eze Nri, but each of the former settlements continues to retain its autonomy in certain fields of ritual and political activity.

Each level of lineages in each ward has a traditional elite of *ozo* men and elders who run their public affairs and compete for power and authority. But the power and authority of lineages at the higher level of the hierarchy are modified by those at the lower level and vice-versa. Similarly, each of the three wards has its traditional elite whose power and authority are also limited by those of the state, symbolized by Eze Nri.

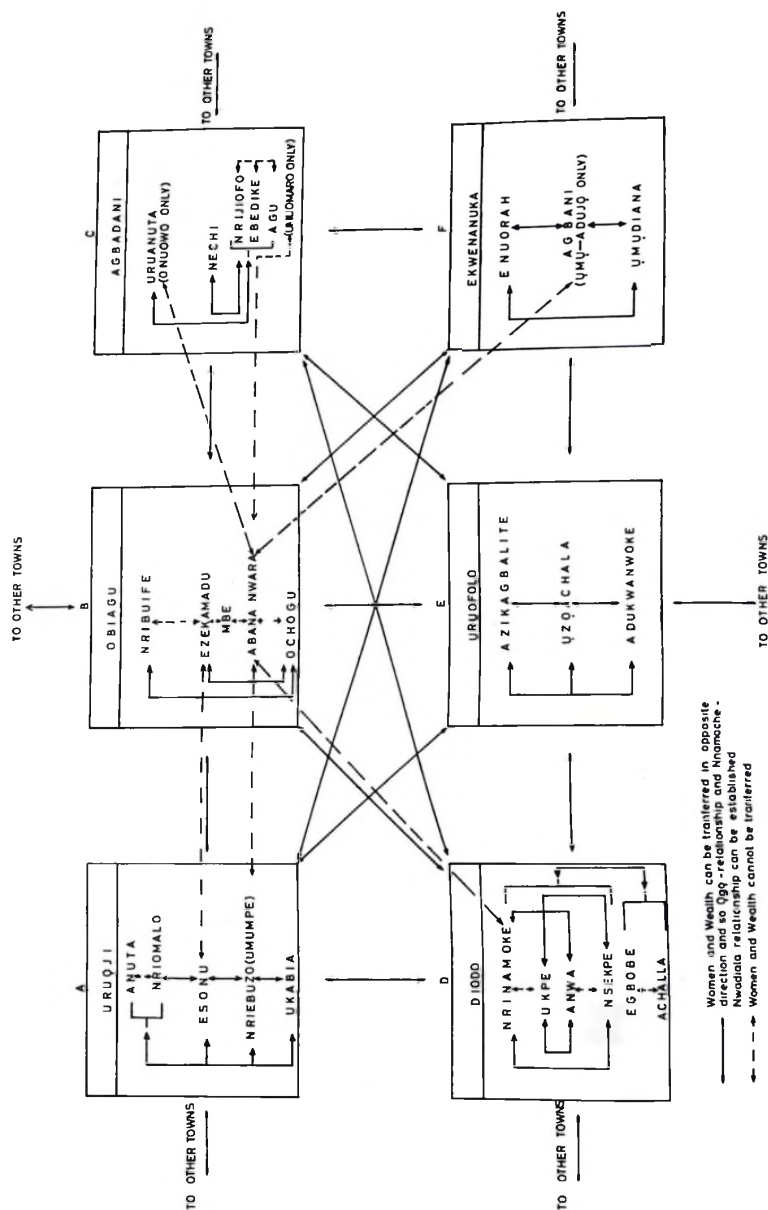
The Eze Nri symbolizes the unity of Nri. He controls the *ozo* title and all the *ofo* and *alo* holders in Nri, because the state *ofo* and *alo* are believed to be derived from that of *ofo-Nrimenri* and *alo-Nrimenri* which are regarded as the symbols of authority and power respectively. The character of this power and authority at both the lineage and state level, and the struggle for control, are the central themes of Nri political action. For the moment I will leave this aside and continue with further analysis of corporate political groupings that exist in Nri.

### The Royal Descent Groups

Nri has a kingship whose succession is based on the circulation of the office amongst certain royal descent groups. Here I will discuss the circulation adopted, the interregnum, the royal descent groups involved and the general implication of this system in terms of Nri politics.

When Nri Ifikuanim, the founder of Agukwu,

Figure 11. The Transfer of Women and Wealth





proclaimed that only his youngest son could assume the office of Eze Nri and his first son that of *okpala*, he separated the holder of the *Ofo-Nri-Menri* staff from the holder of the *Ofo-Okpala-Nri*. The first son of Ifikuanim, who was Onyiora, the founder of Agbadana maximal lineage, was to be the holder of *Ofo-Okpala-Nri* but it was transferred to Alikeni, the founder of Uruoji. Ogboo who died young was succeeded by Nribuife who became the founder of the major lineage of Umu Nri Obeagu and the holder of *Ofo-Nri-Menri*. While Nri Namoke of Diodo was dying he transferred Diodo kingship to Agukwu by giving his sister's son, Nribuife, the staff of office. Thus Nribuife became the inheritor of two kingships, that of Diodo acquired by a dynastic transfer of office and that of Agukwu acquired by ultimogeniture. Earlier there was a marriage alliance between Nri Ifikuanim and Ezekanebo of Umu Diana. Thus the Umu Diana gained the prerogative of crowning and serving all Eze Nri, and hence all the lineages attached to the Umu Diana lineages, now called Akamkpisi, are regarded as king-makers although the real king-makers are the Umu Diana.

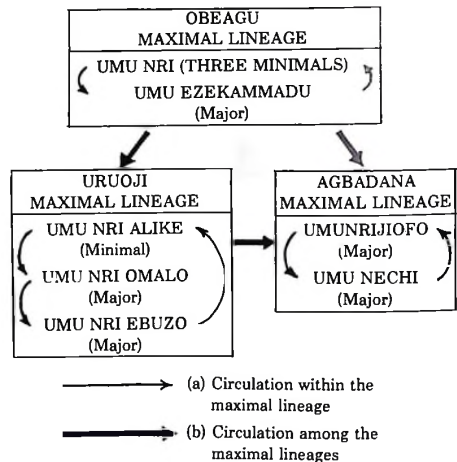
The unification of Diodo and Agukwu kingship and the marriage alliance between Agukwu and Umu Diana and the territorial proximity of Diodo and Umu Diana lineages made the unification of the three settlements under Nribuife possible. As time went on, three power structures emerged: the Diodo king-losers, the Agukwu king-owners and the Akamkpisi (Umu Diana) king-makers.

In this section I am more concerned with the king-owners as a corporate political group. When Diodo kingship was transferred to Agukwu, Nribuife was supported by his two brothers, Onyiora and Alikeni, against the protest made by Diodo lineages who wanted Nribuife to return the paraphernalia and office of Eze Nri of Diodo. The three brothers agreed to co-operate and ensure that the unified kingship should continue and that Diodo's protest be ignored and frustrated by their combined actions. The rule laid down by Nri Ifikuanim, the founder and father of Agukwu, was reaffirmed and elaborated further by them proclaiming that henceforth kingship should rotate from the children of Nribuife (Obeagu) to those of Alikeni (Uruoji) to those of Onyiora (Agbadana), and that only the youngest sons could be ritually inspired to compete for the office of kingship. It was also agreed that at least seven years should

elapse between the death of an Eze Nri and the coronation of his successor. The rotation is believed to have been strictly followed, except in one case, since then to this day. The mode of succession, which is in its fourth cycle, is shown in Table 40.<sup>13</sup> Four major successional disputes have occurred: the first in the seventeenth century, the second and third in the eighteenth century and the fourth in the twentieth century (see Chapter 8).

Nri kingship rotates at two levels (see Figure 12). The first level is among the three maximal lineages of Agukwu: Obeagu, Uruoji and Agbadana. The second level is within each maximal lineage. Thus in the maximal lineage of Obeagu only two major lineages produce kings, Umu Nri and Umu Ezekammadu. Similarly in Uruoji kingship rotates between two major lineages, Umu Nri Omalo and Umu Nri Ebuzo and one minimal lineage of Umu Nri Alike. The status of Umu Nri Alike as a king producing lineage is still doubtful. In Agbadana kingship rotates between Umu Nrijofo and Umu Nechi major lineages. The rotation within the maximal lineages is not rigid since it is not based

Fig. 12 Two Levels of Circulating Succession in Nri



on any previous agreement. It seems to have evolved to minimize competition which could disrupt maximal lineage solidarity.

The maximal lineages of Agukwu jealously protect their kingship as a corporate group.

Table 31 Men's Titles and the Lineage Groups Involved – Agukwu

Period of Life	Titles			
	Agbadana	Uruoji	Obeagu	Group Involved
12th day after birth of a male child to about 9 years	1. Isa Mgbo 2. Ime Asa 3. Iba Obu 4. Izu Afia 5. Ekwensu 6. Igba Agwu	1. Isa Mgbo 2. Ime Asa 3. Iba Obu 4. Ekwensu 5. Igba Agwu	1. Isa Mgbo 2. Ime Asa 3. Iba Obu 4. Ekwensu 5. Igba Agwu	Minimal lineage Minimal lineage Minimal lineage Minimal lineage Minimal lineage
About 10 years old to before marriage	7. Ima Mmanwu 8. Ozo Ichi 9. Ime Agwu 10. Okike 11. Ifijiokwu 12. Amanwulu (some) 13. Ime Ngene	6. Ima Mmanwu 7. Ozo Ichi 8. Ime Agwu 9. Okike Oduno 10. Ofo Amanwulu	6. Ima Mmanwu 7. Ozo Ichi 8. Ime Agwu 9. Okike 10. Ifijiokwu 11. Amanwulu (some)	Minimal to major Minimal to major Minimal to major Minimal to major Major to maximal Major to maximal
After marriage to Ozo title	14. Ima Chi 15. Ekwu Oduno 16. Ilinwammadu 17. Ekwu Ifite 18. Ofo Ozo 19. Obunisi	11. Ima Chi 12. Ife Ani 13. Oduno 14. Ife Akamkpisi 15. Ani Nwamadi 16. Ofo Ozo 17. Obunisi	12. Ima Chi 13. Ekwu Oduno 14. Nlinwammadu 15. Ekwu Ifite 16. Ofo Ozo 17. Obunisi	Minimal Major to maximal Major to maximal Major to maximal Major Ogwe Ozo and all Nri Ogwe Ozo
Post-Ozo	20. Ofo Ntufuazu 21. Ntufuazu 22. Ifieko Ofo Ozo 23. Odu Okike 24. Ike Ili	18. Ofo Ntufuazu 19. Ntufuazu 20. Ifieko Ofo Ozo 21. Odu Okike 22. Ike Ili	18. Ofo Ntufuazu 19. Ntufuazu 20. Ifieko Ofo Ozo 21. Odu Okike 22. Ike Ili	Ogwe Ozo Ogwe Ozo Ogwe Ozo Maximal Minimal to maximal and all Nri
Nri Title	25. Nri	23. Nri	23. Nri	All Nri

Similarly the component lineages of the maximal lineages that are king-owners jealously guard against the abuse of the rules laid down concerning succession.

#### Ozo Alliance Group

In Chapter 5 it was shown that title taking pervades the political life of Nri people. When a Nri man says: 'I am Nri', he means specifically that he belongs to one of the lineages in Nri. He also means that he acts like a Nri. Acting like a Nri implies that he is title conscious in all social situations. To become a political personality in Nri one must have taken all the titles mentioned in Tables 31, 32 and 33.

The whole process of taking titles is called *ichi echichi* and the rites and rituals associated with each title are called *emime* or *mmemme*. Such titles like *Ozo*, *Ichi*, *Ofo amanwulu*, *Ofo ozo*, *Nli Nwam-*

*madu* and *Ovunsi* are specifically called *echichi*. Nri titles have the following peculiarities:<sup>14</sup>

- (i) One starts taking titles twelve days after birth. Parents generally pay for the first ten titles for their sons and the first six for their daughters. As the child grows into adulthood he or she raises the money to pay for the others, although he may be helped by his relatives and wealthy parents may pay for them for their adult children.
- (ii) All titles taken before marriage, (which occurs between 25 and 30 years) are regarded as minor titles and those taken after marriage are regarded as major ones. But each title is an important link in the hierarchy of titles.
- (iii) All titles are purchased by payment. It is believed that the past Eze Nri introduced the titles, and the reigning Eze is regarded as the custodian of all the titles, especially the major

Table 32 Men's Titles and Lineage Groups Involved – Diodo and Akamkpisi

Period of Life	Titles		Group Involved
	Diodo	Akamkpisi	
12th day after birth to about 9 years	1. Isa Mgbo 2. Ime Asa 3. Ekwensu 4. Igba Agwu	1. Isa Mgbo 2. Ime Asa 3. Ekwensu 4. Igba Agwu	Minimal lineage Minimal lineage Minimal lineage Minimal lineage
About 10 years to before marriage	5. Ima Mmanwu 6. Ozo Ichi 7. Ofo Amanwulu	5. Ima Mmanwu 6. Ozo Ichi 7. Ofo Amanwulu	Maximal lineage Maximal lineage Maximal lineage
After marriage to Ozo title	8. Ima Chi 9. Ofo Ozo 10. Nli Nwammadu 11. Obunisi	8. Ima Chi 9. Ofo Ozo 10. Nli Nwammadu 11. Obunisi	Minimal lineage Ogwe Ozo Maximal lineage Ogwe Ozo
Post-Ozo titles	12. Ike Ile 13. Ntufu Azu 14. Odu Okike	12. Ike Ili 13. Ntufu Azu 14. Odu Okike	Minimal to maximal and all Nri Ogwe Ozo Diodo and Akamkpisi

ones. The Eze Nri makes these titles available to any person who can purchase them and perform the rites and observe the taboos associated with them.

(iv) Some of the titles confer on the individual only a change of status, while others not only confer a change of status but also designate specific role categories to the individual.

(v) No title in Nri is hereditary. If the recipient dies the title lapses after a short period in a few cases and immediately in many cases.

(vi) The titles are arranged hierarchically and are taken beginning with the lowest and proceeding to the highest.

(vii) A person is not called by the name of the title he has taken. It is simply acknowledged that he has taken such-and-such a title. The person assumes the new status and performs the roles attached to it, if any.

(viii) For each title taken the person moves up a step higher. If the title has paraphernalia, the person must always wear or use them.

(ix) The individual who takes the title becomes a member of the title association if it has one. He becomes entitled to a share or shares when new entrants make their payments.

(x) Eze Nri is the only person who has taken all the titles in the hierarchy. For Nri is the highest. Eze Nri is regarded as the ultimate controller because he alone can authorize the abrogation,

Table 33 Women's Titles for all Nri

Period of Life	Titles	Group Involved
12th day after birth to before marriage	Isa Mgbo Ime Asa Iba Obu Izu Afia Igba Agwu Eme Ekwe	Minimal lineage Minimal lineage Minimal lineage Minimal lineage Minimal lineage Minimal lineage
After marriage to old age	Ihota Chi Itu Mkpuké Nne Mmanwu	Minimal lineage Minimal lineage Minimal lineage and all Nri

alteration and making of new taboos associated with all the major titles. But, in practice, Eze Nri does not control the number of the minor titles or the rules regarding the procedure of both the minor and major title-taking. The lineages do this and it is only in cases of serious disagreement that cannot be resolved at the lineage level that matters are referred to Eze Nri.

The character of the group that controls the number of titles and their procedures differ from ward to ward. In Agukwu it is the maximal lineages that have the right to alter the number of the minor titles or to modify the rules and procedures of the major titles. In Diodo and Akamkpisi it is the maximal lineages of these wards that jointly perform this function. The groups that control the number of titles and their procedures differ from the groups that deal with the management of the conferring of titles. Column

five in Table 31 and column four in Table 32 show that the titles taken before the age of nine are managed by the minimal lineages, while those taken after the age of nine and most of those taken after marriage are managed by the maximal and major lineages, whilst the *ozo* set of titles and the post-*ozo* titles are managed by a larger group called *Ogwe Mmuo*.

An individual takes the titles from the appropriate group. These *Ogwe mmuo* are kinship-based since they are patrilineages of variable depth and span. But the *Ogwe mmuo* have special characteristics. In general they are groups consisting of various major, minor and minimal lineages from different maximal lineages of the same ward in Nri. These lineages are bound together by an agreement generally contracted and sealed by oath-taking by the leaders of the various lineages. The main function of these *Ogwe mmuo* is to conduct the affairs of the *ozo* and some post-*ozo* title-taking that involve the buying of new and old *ofo* staffs within the group and the sharing of the dividends accruing from the buying and selling of the new *ofo* staffs amongst its members; also to see that new members make the correct payment and perform the correct ritual, and that former members receive the correct shares and observe the rules of the group. Tables 34, 35 and 36 show that Agukwu has five of these groups, Diodo has one and Akamkpisi two.

The formation and dissolution of the *Ogwe mmuo* and the buying and selling of the *ofo* staffs are major issues in the internal political and economic organization of Nri. The next section examines how these contractual groups are formed from lineage groupings.

### The Marriage Alliance Groups

There are fifteen exogamous groups in Agukwu, six in Diodo and six in Akamkpisi. Tables 37, 38 and 39 show the span and depth of the lineages. Here I am not going to discuss the variations in the structure of these exogamous groups, but only the political significance of the consequence of the exchange of women and wealth that takes place among these lineage groupings.

Figure 11 illustrates how women (wives) and wealth (bride-gifts) are exchanged amongst the exogamous groups. The continuous double-headed arrows in the diagram indicate that the lineage involved can exchange 'women' for 'wealth' and so

establish certain types of relationships. The broken double-headed arrows indicate that the lineages involved cannot exchange 'women' for 'wealth'.

In Nri, lineages that cannot exchange 'women' for 'wealth' consider it an abomination to do so because they claim a common ancestor at a certain level in their genealogy. Thus, Esonu and Ezekammadu are two exogamous groups of different maximal lineages that cannot inter-marry because they claim that their founding ancestors were the same father and the same mother. Similarly Anuta and Nri Omalo of the same ward cannot inter-marry because both have the same father and mother, but both do inter-marry with Nri Ebuzo with whom they share a common father but different mothers. So a claim of common motherhood is the basic criterion used in determining the exogamous group although other principles may be evoked to modify it.

Each of these exogamous units also inter-marries with lineages of other towns. Indeed about one-third of Nri wives are women married from other Igbo towns. Such marriages have far-reaching political implications. Marriage in Nri is not regarded merely as a union between a man and a woman or as a bundle of rights and duties acquired by a man and a woman upon entering a socially/culturally determined union. Marriage in Nri transcends all these. It is more an agreement between two exogamous units to accept the rights and duties generated by the union of two persons of the opposite sex from two different groups. This union involves a woman leaving her patrilineage to live in her husband's patrilineage. These patrilineages may or may not be related genealogically. Marriage is therefore not only an individual contract but also a group contract. Marriage agreement is generally sealed by the initial exchange of wife for wealth. This involves the receiving of either and the giving of either, the double act of giving and receiving being symbolically sealed by elaborate rites. This agreement is perpetuated by three important kinship relationships which the exchange creates and generates: firstly, the in-law relationships called *ogo*; secondly, the sister's son-mother's brother relationship, which is equivalent to the daughter's son-mother's father relationship called *Nwadiala-Nnamochie* in Nri kinship terminology; thirdly, the daughter relationships called *nwa okpu* or *nwa ada* (plural:



Table 34 Ogwe Mmuo Groups – Agukwu

Lineage	Maximal Lineage	Status of Lineage	1967	1972	Total
Group 1	Umu Aguonya	Agbadana	30	36	66
	Umu Mbe	Obeagu			
	Umu Ezekammadu	Obeagu			
	Umu Nri Obeagu	Obeagu			
Group 2	Umu Akpaka Nechi	Agbadana	47	75	122
	Umu Nrijofo	Agbadana			
	Umu Anuta	Uruoji			
	Umu Ebedike	Agbadana			
	Umu Anuta	Agbadana			
	Umu Esoghana	Uruoji			
Group 3	Umu Abananwara	Obeagu	9	20	29
	Umu Ochogu	Obeagu			
Group 4	Umu Nri Ebuzo	Uruoji	8	12	20
Group 5	Umu Nri Omalo	Uruoji	7	18	25

Table 35 Ogwe Mmuo Groups – Akamkpisi

Lineage	Maximal Lineage	Status of Lineage	Approximate no. of Ozo men		
			1967	1972	Total
Group 4	Umu Okpobe	Umu Adikwa	20	26	46
	Umu Nwakwu	Umu Adikwa			
	Umu Ajagu	Umu Adikwa			
	Ezika	Umu Ezika			
	Okpatulu	Umu Okpatulu			
Group 5	Umu Diana	Umu Diana	21	31	52
	Agbana	Umu Nto			
	Enuora	Umu Nto			
	Umu Nwausa (Ugwu)	Umu Adikwa			

Notes for Tables 34, 35 and 36.

Total ozo men 1967: 148  
Total ozo men 1972: 232  
Total: 380

This large (57%) increase occurs because Biafran currency was used for title-taking immediately after the Civil War in 1970.

Table 36 Ogwe Mmuo Groups – Diodo

Lineage	Maximal Lineage	Status of Lineage	Approximate no. of Ozo men		
			1967	1972	Total
Group 6	Umu Nrinamoke	Umu Nrinamoke	6	14	20
	Umu Egbobe	Uzo Achalla			
	Umu Okpe	Umu Nrinamoke			
	Umu Anwa	Umu Nrinamoke			

*umu okpu* or *umu ada*).<sup>15</sup>

In-laws, *ogo*, specific or classificatory, are expected to protect the interest and life of one another. The lineages that have exchanged wives for wealth or wealth for wives are bound by the legal, moral and ritual obligations generated by the alliance to protect the interest, life and

property of all members of the other marriage groups – they may not fight or cheat one another in marketing. If the marriage is blessed with male children the second type of relationship will be established.

This second type of relationship has a deeper and lasting symbolic meaning which is of great

political utility. The daughter's son or sister's son has very strong ties with the mother's father or the mother's brother and with all members of his mother's father's or mother's brother's lineage. He is called *nwadiala* and he calls them *nnamochia*. Affection and respect generally exist between them. Such a child has certain rights and duties in his mother's patrilineage. He could live there, own land there, take the *ozo* title there, become absorbed into his mother's patrilineage and become an auxiliary chief priest in the ancestor temple. Cases of this type of absorption are common in Nri lineages; the Umu Ochogu and Umu Mbe of Obeagu, Umu Eme of Umu Nri Omalo of Uruoji are typical examples. This type of tie became the basis for the unification of Nri town. These are earlier examples of the political importance of the *nwadiala-nnamochie* relationship.

In the past, Nri lineages in Nri had this type of tie with lineages of other Igbo towns. According to my own figures, one third of married Nri women in 1971 were from different parts of Igbo land. Nri men operating in different parts of Igbo land established marriage alliance with dominant lineages in the town by marrying their daughters, and by Nri men giving them their Nri daughters. Also, dominant lineages of these Igbo towns gave their daughters as gifts to Nri men in appreciation of the ritual and political work the Nri men had done for their town. These gifts were sealed by a token transfer of 'wealth' by the Nri men. The gifts of women and the token transfer of wealth created marriage alliances, for the women were married into Nri lineages. Thus the links between two stranger lineages would be transformed into friendly alliances.

The free access that Nri men had in the older Igbo settlements and the proliferation of Nri lineages in other Igbo towns, as discussed in Chapter 1, are partly based on this type of tie. Indeed, evidence shows that sister's sons or daughter's sons left Nri to live in their mother's brother's or mother's father's lineages in other Igbo towns. They grew up in their mothers' towns and after their death their lineages became part of the town. They knew the secret of the towns and were therefore reliable agents of Eze Nri and the *agbala* cult (discussed in Chapter 7). Similarly, the children of Nri women married outside Nri came to live in their mothers' lineages in Nri town. They became Nri and through them Nri men

Table 37  
Types of Exogamous Groups in Agukwu

Ward	Exogamous Lineage	Status of Lineage
Uruoji	Umu Anuta	Major
	Umu Nri Omalo	Major
	Umu Esonu	Major
	Umu Nri Ebuzo	Major
	Umu Ukabia	Minimal
Obeagu	Umu Nri	Minimal (Minor)
	Umu Ezekamadu	Major
	Umu Mbe	Minimal
	Umu Abananwara	Minimal
	Umu Ochogu	Minimal
Agbadana	Uruanuta	Minimal
	Umu Akpaka (Nechi)	Major
	Umu Nrijofo	Major
	Umu Ebedike	Major
	Umu Aguonya	Major

Table 38  
Types of Exogamous Groups in Diodo

Ward	Exogamous Lineage	Status of Lineage
Diodo	Umu Nri Namoke	Maximal (Minimal)
	Umu Ukpe	Minimal
	Umu Anwa	Minimal
	Umu Nsekpe	Maximal (Minimal)
	Umu Egbobe	Major
	Achala	Maximal (Minimal)

Table 39  
Types of Exogamous Groups in Akamkpisi

Ward	Exogamous Lineage	Status of Lineage
Uruofolo	Ezika Ogbalite	Maximal (Minimal)
	Uzo Achalla (Umu Okpatulu)	Maximal
	Adikwanwoke	Maximal
Ekwenanuka and Umu Diana	Enuora	Major
	Agbana	Major
	Umu Diana	Maximal

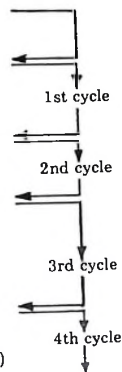
established sound and reliable communication with those towns. Nri lineages in the Nsukka area, Adazi, Abacha constitute examples of this type of occupation of Igbo settlements by lineages that had their origin in one of the types of ties I have been describing.

A Nri proverb says: 'Women are used to clear and maintain the passage of communication in

Table 40 Circulating Succession in Nri

(see Genealogy Chart, Figure 1)

1ST	NRI IFIKUANIM OF AGUKWU	}
2ND	NRI NAMOKE OF DIODO	
3RD	EZE NRI NRIBUIFE-OBEAGU MAXIMAL LINEAGE	
4TH	EZE NRI (name forgotten) - URUOJI MAX: LINEAGE	
5TH	EZE NRI NRIFOJO-AGBADANA MAXIMAL LINEAGE	
6TH	EZE NRI (name forgotten) - OBEAGU MAX: LINEAGE	
7TH	EZE NRI ANYAMATA - URUOJI MAXIMAL LINEAGE	
8TH	EZE NRI NRIFENENE - AGBADANA MAXIMAL LINEAGE	
9TH	EZE NRI AGU - OBEAGU MAXIMAL LINEAGE	
10TH	EZE NRI APIA & NRI ALIKE - URUOJI MAX: LINEAGE	
11TH	EZE NRI EZIMILO - AGBADANA MAXIMAL LINEAGE	
12TH	EZE NRI EWENETEM - AGBADANA MAXIMAL LINEAGE	
13TH	EZE NRI ENWELEANA - OBEAGU MAXIMAL LINEAGE	
14TH	EZE NRI OBALIKE - URUOJI MAXIMAL LINEAGE (died 1927)	
15TH	EZE NRI JIMOFO II - AGBADANA MAXIMAL LINEAGE (crowned 1937)	



foreign land'. Another says: 'The path of marriage is the path that leads to the stream and is always open.' These proverbs point to the significance of marriage alliance in human relationships.

The third type of relationship created is centred on the wife and female children of the marriage. The wife is also a classificatory daughter in her father's patrilineage and, similarly, the female children of a marriage are daughters in their father's lineage. In Nri religious ideology, the marriage of a woman into another patrilineage ritually strengthens her claim as a daughter, *Nwa ada* or *Nwa okpu*, in her father's patrilineage. The status of marriage confers on her, after her death, the ritual right to reincarnate in the newly born daughters of her father's patrilineage and her mother's brother's patrilineage. This she could never do if she had not married. During her married life she is constantly called upon by her lineage to perform certain rituals associated with mortuary rites, births, and title-taking. If she refuses, certain activities could be paralysed.

In the spirit world, according to Nri beliefs, *Umu okpu* play a major role among the ancestors in calming them. For this reason *Umu okpu* are respected, loved and pampered in this physical world. Their anger against their brother or mother's brother or against their patrilineages has grave ritual consequences. When *Nwa okpu* dies her corpse must be physically returned to her patrilineage by her husband's lineages, who carry the corpse to the boundary between the lineages or

towns and hand it over ceremoniously to her patrilineage who take it home for burial.<sup>16</sup>

These daughters have great political influence in their patrilineages, in their mother's father's patrilineages and in their husband's patrilineages. They can arouse the members of their father's patrilineages into action ranging from violence to appeasement.

#### The Amulununo Women Group

In Nri the female population is dichotomised into those who are Nri and those who are not Nri. A woman born and married in Nri is called *amulununo*, meaning 'born of Nri parents' - about two-thirds of married women in Nri are *amulununo*. Because these women are Nri and are married in Nri, in Nri kinship terminology and behaviour patterns they are called and regarded as *Umu Okpu Nri*. Above I discussed *Umu Okpu* as individuals important in the various marriage alliances between exogamous groups in Nri. Here I will consider them acting as a group.

These women belong to three patrilineages: the patrilineages of their birth where they have brothers, sisters and fathers, specific and classificatory; the lineages of their husbands where they have daughters, sons, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law and friends; and the lineages of their mothers' brothers. As married 'daughters' they can be reincarnated in any of these three lineages and have specific rights and duties in each of them.

Since marriage is viri-local, by the time these

women are forty they have experienced about 20 to 25 years of marriage resident in their husbands' patrilineages, and are therefore fully entrenched in their husbands' patrilineages ritually, socially and economically. Ritually, they observe some of the taboos their husbands observe and are partners in their husbands' title-taking, whilst socially they may have sons who are leaders in their lineage and daughters who are married into other lineages. Economically, they control the farming and internal trading activities of Nri. By the time they are fifty or more their sons, in-laws and friends are dominant figures in the various lineages. Thus a successfully married Nri woman has kinship and non-kinship connections that arise from the fact of her marriage, birth and personality.

In these women's patrilineages they have great influence because they are *Umu okpu*. They are not allowed to cry. It is regarded as a terrible thing for *Nwa okpu* to cry, and it arouses a lot of disturbing emotions because her crying is a symbolic communication sent to the dead ancestor of *Ndi ichie*. Her cry rends the hearts of her brothers, own and classificatory. It reaches the spirit world of the ancestor, for the dead *Nwa okpu* will in turn cry. The *Ndi ichie* ancestors will send their vengeance on the living male adults and their wives until they dry the tears of the living *Umu okpu*. Nri people 'fear' the 'wet eyes' of *Umu okpu*. Similarly these women have great influence in their mothers' patrilineages.

The individual links of *Nwa okpu* are therefore the greatest weapons they have against a male-dominant society. When these women *amulununo* act collectively they constitute one of the most turbulent pressure groups, one which could topple any political grouping in Nri on which they have reason to direct their attack.

The *amulununo* group is organized by elderly women and up to this day they have the power to influence the modification of any law they consider repressive. All other political groupings in Nri, including Eze Nri, recognize this fact. The only tactics used against them are to split them and never allow them to form an effective group.

Nri politicians realize that two of the major problems of the *amulununo* are leadership and gossip. Once a good and able elderly woman leads them they are formidable. For example, between 1926 and 1929 the *amulununo* had a very powerful leader who organized them, but she died in

1929. In about 1931 the *amulununo* formed a dance group and Nri men politicians seized the opportunity to disrupt the group. The dance arrangement collapsed because of uncontrolled gossip. The group broke up into factions reflecting lineage cleavages. They didn't recover from this disaster until 1940, when they regrouped and became effective again until about 1960, when cleavages due to differences in religious beliefs emerged to weaken the structure of authority of the group. Indeed, the elderly women who still remain traditional in their religious beliefs find it difficult to control the younger ones who are educated in the Western way and are mostly Roman Catholics, Anglicans and members of the new syncretic religions that have recently invaded Nri town.

### Conclusion

I have been illustrating the point that in Nri corporate political groupings based on territoriality, descent groups, temples, *ozo*-title alliance, marriage alliance and *amulununo* are inter-dependent groupings which derive their basic structure from the Nri segmentary system.

The principle of segmental opposition was known among political theorists of the nineteenth century as 'the balance of power'. The theory was almost abandoned by the beginning of the twentieth century. Then Professor E.E. Evans-Pritchard introduced the concept to anthropology as segmentary opposition through his researches into Nuer lineages.<sup>17</sup> Since then various anthropologists have applied the same principle when describing lineage formation and political action among such peoples as the Tallensi, Bedouin, Tiv and even the Igbo.<sup>18</sup> Although E. Peters criticized Evans-Pritchard's conclusions, he did not criticize the concept. It was after the publication of Sahlins' article on 'The Segmentary Lineage...' that attempts were made to question the view that balanced opposition between like segments was central to segmentary lineage organization.<sup>19</sup>

The theory of balance of power in its simplest form is based on the assumption that political segments are equal:  $A = B = C = D$ . Thus if political stability is to be maintained the tendency will be for A to ally with B, and C to ally with D to produce  $A + B = C + D$ . Thus the relationships involved are those of equality, symmetry and opposition.



Using similar principles, advocates of the principle of segmentary lineage structures imposed models of lineage organization in which ranking took place within a pyramidal hierarchy of authority stemming from the ancestors whose living embodiment the elders are, and in which the formation of opposed segments invariably proceeded from closely to more distantly related lines. The assumption was that political action between lineages would pass from the minimal to the maximal level of segmentation. Thus related but autonomous lineages combine to worship a common ancestor or to fight a common enemy. After this association (or opposition) they revert to their former autonomy. Even when there is evidence of some lineages dying out and some segmenting faster than others, these theorists postulate that genealogies are adjusted in order to preserve the equality and symmetry of the system.<sup>20</sup>

Do lineages really segment downwards and combine upwards in this symmetrical and equal formation? Does this symmetry and equality really exist as an empirical fact? Or is it a figment of an imaginative anthropological proposition

remote from reality? The Nri case analysed here demonstrates that these assumptions are challengeable. Lineage segmentation in real life, at least in Nri, is neither symmetrical nor equal.

It is correct to say that segmentary opposition does occur in segmentary lineages but to argue that it is the dominant political feature of segmentary lineages or that group formation is symmetrical or equal may be empirically incorrect. The Nri case shows that in societies where wealth differentiation and associational groupings are marked, and where other structures cut across lineage boundaries, segmentary opposition becomes a minor feature of the political process. Lineages exhibit marked internal inequalities due to significant differences in the economic power between lineages and demographic variations. Segmentation becomes asymmetrical. Thus the theory of 'balanced opposition' based on a 'balance of power' does not hold for the Nri case. It also seems likely that a re-examination of the Tiv, Nuer and Tallensi lineages, which seem to segment with mechanical precision, from this point of view may show that they are like the Nri type.

## CHAPTER SIX: NOTES

1. M.G. SMITH, *Political Organisation*, 1968, pp. 193-201.

By group I mean corporate group as defined by Smith: '...all corporate groups have a distinct identity, a determinate membership, closure, the presumption of indefinite continuity, common exclusive affairs, and the autonomy, procedures and organizations necessary to regulate them.'

2. Each Igbo village is an autonomous political group. When villages give up some aspects of their autonomy to form a larger political group, this process is akin to what occurs in federations.

3. There is indirect evidence to support the probable human habitation of the old sites, e.g. remnants of dilapidated buildings of most recent cases, surface pottery, nature of vegetation, especially the presence of ritual trees like *Ogilisi* (*Newboldia laevis*, Seem) and *Ogbu* (*Cassia*) and the differential growth of vegetation in the rainy and dry seasons on settlement sites, the land forms and contour of the area, and the differences in the colour and texture of surface soil.

4. There is evidence to show that individuals are adopted into lineages. By residential attachment I mean that non-lineage

members who reside in a lineage land for several generations are incorporated into the lineage and regarded as 'sons' of the founder.

5. M. FORTES, *African Political Systems*, 1940, p. 243.

Fortes defined a maximal lineage as '...the most extensive group of individuals tracing descent from a single common ancestor', and a minimal lineage as 'consisting of the children of one man'.

- E.E. EVANS-PRITCHARD, *African Political Systems*, 1940, p. 285.

Evans-Pritchard defined maximal as segments of a clan.

I have used the term minimal to mean the smallest politically significant lineage; and maximal to mean the largest politically significant lineage that is a segment of a larger unit. This unit may be a clan as in Diodo or a group that is genealogically related to a common ancestor, as in Agukwu. This is the Nri way of looking at lineages as corporate political groupings.

6. L. and P. BOHANNAN, *The Tiv of Central Nigeria*, 1954.

M. FORTES, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi*, 1945 and *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi*, 1949.

7. In a certain religious conception that is connected with

ancestor cult, ideally, grandfathers are reincarnated in their grandsons. Reincarnation follows the principle of alternate generations as a rule, but there are some exceptions. (See Figure 4 in Chapter 3).

8. Mbe and Enuchie are generally called the daughters of Nriboife. In this case 'daughter' is used as a classificatory term.

9. Many Nri lineages in Agulu and Adazi claim to have migrated from Diodo. Diodo's claim of a crisis that led to migrations from Diodo is thus partly corroborated by the claims of these lineages.

10. Umu Diana do not accept that they are Ekwenanuka. It is Umu Nto, i.e. Agbana and Enuora, that are Ekwenanuka. Ekwenanuka is a praise name of Umu Nto. Most Nri lineages have praise names.

11. These markers of autonomy and independence vary, but the four constant markers are a common founding ancestor and *Ana Ukwu, Ofo*, and the four market supernaturals, *Eke, Oye, Afo, Nkwo*. A settlement, no matter how small, that has these features was once autonomous. Several settlements have federated into big towns, but each former autonomous settlement still has the above features. The markets may not exist after the union with other bigger units, but the supernatural beings may still have their locations where a symbolic and ritual marketing may be held for the supernatural in time of distress.

This may be the unit G.I. Jones refers to as village-groups. What he calls a village I call a ward, meaning an administrative division of a town. A village is an assemblage of dwellings in a town. To me the Igbo maximal lineages, as they are at present, are political divisions in a town, not a mere assemblage of dwellings.

12. M.A. ONWUEJEOGWU, *The Typology of Settlement Patterns in the Igbo Culture Area in Odinani*, Vol. 1, No. 1.  
G.I. JONES, *Councils among the Central Ibo*.

13. The king lists as recorded by both Northcote Thomas, 1910-1914, and M.D.W. Jeffreys, 1931-1934, are misleading, because some kings are named twice by being given their real name and their title name; some were never kings but incarnations of the kings; some were names that do not occur in Nri oral tradition, and some were never mentioned at all. The nearest correct list is probably the one used in chapter 2

which is based on a more extensive and serious enquiry. (See References).

14. J. GOODY, *Succession to High Office*, 1966, p. 171.

Jack Goody defined titles as follows:

1. 'Designations for restricted role categories.'
2. 'Individualized role names' and 'ranked in ordinal series'.
3. 'Generalized terms of reference or address, which means that the role extends its influence over the social personality of the title-holder...'

In the Nri case some titles only elevate the social status of the individual without specific role categories being attached to them. These may be called minor titles. Other titles not only elevate the status of individuals but have specific roles attached to them. These may be called major titles. Both types are arranged in a mixed way in the hierarchy so that the lower one validates the taking of the next higher until one takes the highest. In Nri it is the total title-system that is more significant than any one particular title.

15. *Nwa ada* is a kinship term specifically when referring to first daughters. But it is a classificatory term when referring to all daughters of a patrilineage. All the kinship terms used here have both specific and classificatory references.

16. The practice of returning the corpse of *Nwa ada* to her father's lineage is still practised in some parts of Igbo land to this day. In other parts it has been discontinued but is symbolically enacted in the mortuary rites. At Nri the two lineages still meet at the boundary and certain death goods are handed over to the woman's patrilineage by her husband's patrilineage, because sons now insist on having their mothers buried in their husband's patrilineage. The sons 'buy' their mother's corpse. In any case, if the woman's patrilineage refuses the burial of their 'daughter' in her husband's patrilineage no one dares bury her there. Negotiations will continue until the husband's lineage is able to convince and persuade the woman's patrilineage. Many go-betweens help to reduce the tension so that both parties can reach an agreement.

17. E.E. EVANS-PRITCHARD, *The Nuer*.

18. W.R.G. HORTON, *Stateless Societies* in 'The History of West Africa'.

19. M. SAHLINS, *The Segmentary Lineage: An Organization of Predatory Expansion in American Anthropology*.

20. L. and P. BOHANNAN, *op. cit.*

W.R.G. HORTON, *op. cit.*

## Chapter 7

### Political Groupings Based on Non-Lineage Principles

Besides lineages, there are eleven other corporate political groupings in Nri whose formation, cohesion and continuity are determined mainly by factors other than lineage principles. In their structures they express something of the segmentary character of Nri lineages, but criteria of membership and the structure sustaining such groupings are not based on lineage principles.

I shall discuss these groupings under the two broad headings traditional and non-traditional. Groupings that were in existence before 1910 are regarded as traditional, while those that emerged after 1910 as a result of the new impetus of change and adaptation are regarded as non-traditional.

#### Traditional Groupings

##### *Ndi Nze*

All men who have taken the *ozo* title in Nri become *ipso facto* members of the *Ndi Nze Nri*. They are regarded as the living and potential ancestors of their lineages, *ichie ukwu*. These men can participate in decision taking in the various meetings of the minimal, minor, major and maximal lineages; meetings of the *ogwe mmuo* and state council meetings of the *Ndi Nze Nri*.<sup>1</sup> The *Ndi Nze Nri* state council meets regularly at the palace of Eze Nri. There they represent not their lineages as such, but rather the interests of the elite to which they belong.

The Eze Nri is the supreme head of the council, but the effective leader of the group is the first amongst them to take the title and he is designated the *isi nze*.

Inquiries show that between 1920 and 1930 there were not more than fifty *ozo* men in the whole of Nri. In 1971 the number had increased to about 380. In the past not all of them attended the

palace council meetings; some were very old, some were in other Igbo villages, some were ill and some were not ritually clean. According to the norm, only those who attended the *onu ebo* ritual confession, held once a year by the *isi nze* of each ward in the secret grove where the *onu ebo* was kept, could attend the Eze Nri's council.

Today, many Christians and educated and wealthy Nri men have taken the *ozo* title by making payments. They do not observe most of the taboos because they are Christians and because Eze Nri has abrogated some of them. Most of these men live outside Nri. Only a core of the traditional elite living in Nri and a handful of modern elite living in Nri now regularly attend this council.

##### *Nzemabua*

Eze Nri had twelve senior *ozo* men as his top advisers. At present there are twenty-four appointed *ozo* men, called *Nzemabua*. The Eze Nri allocates twelve *ozo* seats to Agukwu lineages and twelve to Diodo and Akamkpisi. This division reflects the dichotomous division of Nri town. The wards appoint their representatives from component lineages. The distribution of these twenty-four senior *ozo* men in terms of lineages between 1967 and 1971 is shown in Table 41. The men appointed are the senior *ozo* men of each lineage group and seniority is based on being first to take the title, buttressed by the ability of the individual. A lineage that had no *ozo* man could appoint an *ozo* man of a related lineage to represent it. Such an *ozo* man is directly responsible to the lineage that appointed him.

The variations in allocation and selection of lineage representatives based on the status of lineages in the different instances given in Chapter

Table 41                      Distribution of Nzemabua State Council Members  
1967 - 1971

Wards	Sub-Wards	Lineages	Status of Lineages	Number of Head of <i>Ozo</i> Men
Agukwu	Agbadana	Umu Akpaka Nechi	Major	1
		Umu Nrijiofo	Major	1
		Umu Agu & Ebedike	Major	1
		Uruanuta	Minimal	1
	Uruoji	Umu Anuta	Major	1
		Umu Omalo	Major	1
		Umu Esonu	Major	1
		Umu Nri Ebuzo	Major	1
	Obeagu	Umu Nri	Minimal	1
		Umu Ezekammadu	Major	1
		Umu Mbe & Abana	Major	1
		Umu Ochogu	Minimal	1
Diodo		Umu Nri Namoke	Maximal	2
		Umu Egbobe	Major	2
	Uruofolo	Umu Ugwu	Major	1
		Umu Okpobe	Major	1
		Umu Okpatulu (Uzo Achalla)	Maximal	1
		Umu Ezika Ogbalite	Maximal	1
Akamkpisi	Umu Diana	Umu Diana	3 Maximals	2
	Ekwenanuka	Agbana Enuora	Major Major	1 1
			Total	24



6 show that in Nri thinking the status of the lineages is equated in different ways and in different contexts. Hence some maximal lineages are equated with major lineages and some with minimal lineages. All these negate the principle of segmentary opposition, which is based on the premise of equality of collateral segments.

The members of the *nzemabua* state council represent both the interests of the lineages to which they belong and the interests of the state. In Chapter 8 I show how they function and, at times, clash. When such interests clash the Eze Nri uses a political grouping called the *okolobia*.

### *Okolobia*

In Nri ideology any adult male without *ozo* title, no matter what his age, is called *okolobia*, meaning young man. The politically active male population in Nri comprises: (a) the traditional elite who are the *ozo*-titled men described above; (b) the elderly experienced men who have wives and have taken the *ichi* – they are representatives of the dead ancestors of their lineages, who had no *ozo* title; hence they are individually called *ichie nta* and collectively called *ndi ichie nta* or *Ikenye okolobia*; (c) the young men who are inexperienced but have formed a recognized age-grade are called *nwa okolobia*. Other males are called children, *umu aka*, and are regarded as minors. Male adults of groups (b) and (c) are also called *okolobia*, which refers to their non-*ozo* status irrespective of their age. It is with these two groups as a single body that this section is concerned.

*Ikenye* or *Ichie nta* play a major role in the politics of Nri. Their views are regarded as important and they have unlimited rights to talk. But in the presence of elderly *ozo* men they may not participate in the taking of final decisions, which is the exclusive responsibility of *ozo*-titled men. The *Ikenye* maintain a balance between the few *ozo* traditional elite and the *okolobia*, who are many but have a limited right to talk in meetings.

The leader of the *okolobia* group, both at the lineage and state levels, is the first elder to have a wife and a child; he has, therefore, performed the *ima chi* rituals. In the absence of this it will be the first to have a wife, and in the absence of this, the oldest person. At the state level the *okolobia* group can be powerful. If the *ndi nze* or *nzemabua* seem to be unfair in the treatment of any public affair, Eze Nri can order the *okolobia* group to sit

and make an independent decision which he could sanction as binding. Since this group represents a considerable number of the total male political population of Nri, their opinions represent the common will of a very important segment of the male population. Individuals attend the *okolobia* meeting forum held at the palace of Eze Nri and participate in discussion if they have the ability to stand and talk before the public; this is called *ora*. Generally, all *ikenye* and a few brilliant *nwa okolobia* participate actively in discussions.

At the lineage level, the *okolobia* group is a permanent feature of the lineage administration. If a lineage has no *ozo* men, the *ikenye okolobia* do all the administrative work. If the lineage has some *ozo* men, the *ikenye* work hand in hand with the *ozo* men, who are regarded as the authorized leaders representing the great ancestors and Eze Nri at that level.

### *Ilimmadunato – Women's Council*

There is a political group recognized at the state level as an official women's organization – the group is called *ilimmadunato*, that is, the thirty women. Recently, Eze Nri authorized that their number be doubled to sixty. The nominal head of this group is the senior *nne mmanwu*, the few elderly women initiated into the secrets of the ritual mask cult. The group is supervised by two *ozo* men, one from each section of the town. They were previously appointed by the *nzemabua* but now the Nri Progress Union appoints them. Eze Nri must approve their appointment.

Thirty women are selected from Agukwu and thirty from Diodo-Akamkpisi. At that level the women of the various maximal lineages select women to represent their interests and care is taken to make sure that all the major lineages in Nri are represented. Women selected are generally those regarded as respectable and successful mothers or wives who are married and residents in Nri. Able women campaign within their lineages to be selected.

This group represents the interests of Nri

### *The Age Grades*

All the male children of a minimal lineage take the ritual title of *ekwensu* in the fifth and sixth month of the Nri traditional calendar in the year, or a year after, they are born. Children of the same

minimal lineage who take this title within a given three year interval are considered as belonging to one age-grade.<sup>2</sup> The children grow up together, play together and participate in the group activities held in the collective and domestic temples of their minimal lineages, where sharing occurs. The taking of shares by children is strictly done according to seniority based on age.

At about the age of eighteen to twenty, the children of the different minimal lineages of Agukwu, Diodo and Akamkpisi are organized to form an age-grade of each ward. In the past each ward had its own separate age-grades, although the system of organization was similar. The new age-grade performed a communal task, took a name that reflected their aspirations and were officially recognized as an age-grade that could participate in the ward's internal and external activities. By 1940, as a result of pressure from the Nri Progress Union, the age-grades of the three wards of the town began to combine. At present, the age-grades are formed at the ward level and are combined at the town level for formal recognition by the Nri Progress Union. Before 1950, the Nri age-grade did not include women. At present, among the younger generation, women born of Nri origin are allowed to join the age-grade of their male equivalent.

Table 42 lists the existing age-grades and the extinct ones still remembered. They are set out in their order of seniority at intervals of three years. Each age-grade has three age-sets: senior, medium and junior. The approximate years of birth of members of each age-grade have been given based on the computation made in 1967. Table 43 gives more information about the extant age-grades, including two newly formed ones. Each of the age-grades is a corporate group that has its own leadership. At present each has a president, a secretary and other officials, owns a common property and fund and is given a common task by the state council or by the Nri Progress Union.

The interesting aspect of Nri age-grades is that members of an age-grade are persons of various minimal lineages in Nri. It is one of the groups in which membership cuts across the lineage principle and its interests transcend kinship obligations.

### *The Dibia*

This is a professional corporate group of traditional medicine men and diviners in Nri - they are

believed to control the *agwu* cult. They are few in number; in 1967 to 1971 there were not more than ten in Nri town. They are also consulted by people from other towns.

Some are *dibia afa*, that is, medicine men specialized in divination; some are *dibia aja*, those specialized in preparing the various sacrifices associated with the different *Mmuo* spirits and the supernatural beings, *Alusi*; others are *dibia ogwu*, those specialized in diagnosing and treating diseases with herbs, charms, talismen and rites. They are also specialized in the treatment of bone fractures, circumcision and clitoridectomy. Others are skilled in anti-witchcraft and anti-

Table 42 Nri Age-Grades

	Calculated Dates	Periodic Age in 1967	Popular Name of Ogbo
	1846 - 48	121 - 119	Oli Okuku
	1849 - 51	118 - 116	
	1852 - 54	115 - 113	
E	1855 - 57	112 - 110	Irunatu
X	1858 - 60	109 - 107	
T	1861 - 63	106 - 104	
I	1864 - 66	103 - 101	Umezuba
N	1867 - 69	100 - 98	
C	1870 - 72	97 - 95	Ijele
T	1873 - 75	94 - 92	Atu
	1876 - 78	91 - 89	Ugo
	1879 - 81	88 - 86	Ochima or Ochokwu
	1882 - 84	85 - 83	Olimgha
	1885 - 87	82 - 80	
	1888 - 90	79 - 77	Ekwueme
	1891 - 93	76 - 74	
	1894 - 96	73 - 71	Mmanenyi
	1897 - 99	70 - 68	Iruugo
	1900 - 02	67 - 65	Iruagu
E			} Irunabo
X	1903 - 05	64 - 62	
T	1906 - 08	61 - 59	Iruatu
A	1909 - 11	58 - 56	Nribuenyi
N	1912 - 14	55 - 53	Iruenyi
T	1915 - 17	52 - 50	Okpatu
	1918 - 20	49 - 47	Ifediora
	1921 - 23	46 - 44	Amakekwu
	1924 - 26	43 - 41	Abakari
	1927 - 29	40 - 38	Atigwe
	1930 - 32	37 - 35	Akpali
	1933 - 35	34 - 32	Akum
	1936 - 38 (39)	31 - 29	Amuoku
	1939 - 41		Okuana
			Uninitiated

Table 43 Some Data About Extant Age Grades (Agukwu) Nri in 1972

Age-grade	When formed	Task done to be recognized	Money in fund	Men registered 1971-72	Women registered 1971-72	Number taken ozo title
EKWUEME	Before 1918	Wrestling	Nil	2	Nil	1
IKENGA NA MMANENYI	c. 1920	Wrestling & masquerade	Nil	10	Nil	5
IRUGO	c. 1925	Wrestling & labour	Nil	17	Nil	5
IRUAGU IRUATU	c. 1930	Communal labour	£27	41	Nil	20
NRIBUENYI *	c. 1935	Wrestling & communal labour	£2	25	3	14
IRUENYI	c. 1935	Wrestling & giving wine & kola	£8	49	35	20
OKPATU	c. 1940	Presentation	10/-	78	32	?
IFEDIORA	9.10.44	Completed Town Hall	?	139	53	55
AMAKEKWU	1937	Staged Ogene dance and masquerade	£28.12.6	111	70	48
ABAKARI	1944	Offered wine and kola	£264	132	127	29
ATIGWE	1948	Wine and kola	£149.13.2	133	78	19
AKPALI	1952	Paid town levy	£150	130	150	45
AKUM	1957	Paid fees	?	159	110	25
AMUOKU	1959	Bought iron seat 165	£250	165	170	3
OKUANA	1965	Paid £1.5 and bought 120 seats	£72	212	75	10
UDOKA ***	1968	?	?	?	?	?
NDUKAKU ***	4.4.70	Entertained all Nri	£5	197	118	Nil

\* Does not include Nribuenyi age-grade of Uruoji

? Information not obtained

\*\*\* Age-grade formed after 1967

sorcery measures and in remedies for snake bites, scorpion and insect stings. They are believed to be experts in preparing charms that can prevent sword, knife and bullet injuries, and charms and talismans for vanishing and transmuting oneself into another animal. Some *dibia* are general practitioners in the sense that they combine the three functions.

These medicine men operate in Nri not only in time of distress. They also know the current state of human affairs in Nri, which they symbolically interpret in the divination language as an aspect of the moral order. Decision-taking processes in Nri, especially of major issues, are long-winded. There are dialogues at both the lineage and the state levels. The leaders at various intervals are expected to consult the *dibia aja*, who accelerate or reduce the rate of the crystallization of public opinion by directing their clients' attention to specific issues. At times the *dibia aja* refers them to the *dibia aja* or *dibia ogwu*.

In Chapter 8 I briefly consider the active but frequently indirect role that the *dibia* group plays in both individual and group decision making in Nri. Here I need only stress that this group is not kinship based. It takes a child, apprenticed at ten, over fifteen years to become a young medicine man and more than another twenty years to become a respectable, recognized one. Skill, acumen, intelligence, fluency in the Nri dialect, patience and initiative are very important qualities of the individuals engaged in this profession.

#### *The Mmanwu Cult Group*

In the list of titles shown in Table 31, the seventh title is *ima mmanwu*. This title is taken individually by all male children around the age of nine. One of the rites connected with this title reveals to the child the secret of the masked spirits and initiates him into the *mmanwu* club of his minimal lineage. There are five types of masked spirits, four of which symbolically represent the four important stages of the life-cycle in the development of man. They are, *ulaga*, *mmanwu agwu*, *ijele mmanwu*, *ikenye mmanwu* and *ijele*. The fifth type represents Nri society symbolically dramatized.

The *ulaga* are the masked spirits of children between the ages of ten and fifteen. The group consists of the children of the same age-grade. The children mask themselves and roam round the village speechless, their hands extended for

alms. They are expected to generate love, affection, sympathy, forgiveness and other emotions said to enoble men; these emotions are supposed to generate peace and harmony in Nri society.

In *mmanwu agwu* are the masked spirits consisting of adolescents between the ages of 16 to 20. These spirits are on the one hand turbulent, violent, mischievous, extravagant of language and able to curse vehemently, and on the other pious, generous, gentle, sacrosanct and generous with blessings. They run around singing, pursuing women and men, and competing amongst themselves by lashing one another with long canes. When they are organized as a group, female spirits are also represented.

The *ijele mmanwu* are the masked spirits organized at the maximal or ward level, who comprise men between the ages of 30 and 45. The behaviour patterns of these spirit masks are vigorous and not destructive. They speak and sing thoughtfully and are supposed to show those mystical qualities that every male adult Nri man aspires to acquire.

The *ikenye mmanwu* are the masked spirits including elderly men over the age of 45 to 80 or more. They are slow in motion, speak and sing in idioms, archaic language, allegories and other figures of speech. They symbolize success, order and discipline of body and mind. They are generally organized on an individual basis. Any elder, formerly skilled in spirit masking, who has money to buy the equipment and an important moral message to send to the society, can organize these spirits.

The *ijele* is organized like a small community of masked dancers. It consists of one principle gigantic masked spirit called *ijele* and about fifteen other minor masked spirits of both sexes. The giant masked spirit is the king of the spirits; it stands like a huge tower constructed with bamboo frames and decorated with colourful cloths, dummies and puppets depicting various village scenes and characters. The largest type are about 30 feet high and 10 or more feet in width and breadth. Two strong men go under it, lift it up about 6 inches from the ground and move away slowly to the rhythm of the drums. The other minor masked spirits represent various personalities in Nri and act like the persons they represent. It is the concept of the state that is dramatized



and symbolized in the *ijele* spirit dancers. The *ijele* giant spirit symbolizes the king of Nri and the minor spirits his followers, that is, the public, *ora*.<sup>3</sup> To perform an *ijele* is a very expensive undertaking, involving huge sums of money and elaborate organization, rehearsals and long spiritual and mystical preparations. A wealthy individual, all Nri, or a ward may decide to put on a show.

Masked spirits generally appear and perform during the mortuary rites of men and the few women who have taken the *mme mmanwu* title. They also appear and perform once a year for a period of about 28 days in the fifth lunar month of the Nri traditional calendar called *onwa agwu*, which generally falls between the month of June and July.

#### *The Agbala Nri Oracle Cult Group*

The Agbala Nri was the most important oracle cult for which Nri town was famous in the past. Towns within the sphere of Nri influence consulted the oracle and it was used as a political instrument to reinforce the belief in the ritual and mystical power of Nri which was the basis of Nri external political affairs.

According to Nri religion *Chukwu* has four aspects. Those who have the mystical knowledge could appeal to *Anyanwu* and *Agbala* aspects of *Chukwu*, and by proper chants and supplications invoke it to reveal to human beings the solution to all major problems of health, fertility and prosperity.

This oracle is operated by a team of specialists whose main objective is to interpret human misfortunes, miseries, failures and disputes in terms of the moral and social orders. Because *Agbala Nri* is basically concerned with the problems of living and dying, the greatest taboo of *Agbala Nri* is the killing of a human being. It is an abomination to kill and all persons who are polluted by this abomination must not consult the oracle without purifying themselves.

The oracle was controlled by three types of experts. The first were the various Nri men living in other Igbo towns who acted as agents and were called the 'eyes' and 'ears' of the *Agbala*. These agents sent to Nri all secret information concerning the life history of all clients about to visit the *Agbala* prior to their arrival. Thus the operators in Nri were able to surprise the clients by telling them about themselves. The second were the go-

betweeners or the media. They introduced the clients of Nri and presented them before the *Agbala*. They also interpreted the language of the oracle to the clients and employed the best traditional medicine men, *Dibia*, to work on behalf of their clients as directed by the *Agbala*. The third were men who operated the *Agbala*. These men were generally well versed in the nuances of the Igbo language and the secret language of Nri; they had powerful and majestic voices and operated in a thick grove at Nri.

The clients were led by the medium who walked in front through a winding and secret bush path. On arrival at a spot near the *Agbala* it roared out in a thunderous voice the name of the client, recited the person's genealogy and spoke of his secrets, successes and failures in life. This initial encounter would petrify the client. He was asked to talk through the medium and the *Agbala* initiated a dialogue until it pronounced its remedies.

The group operating the *Agbala* cult was an interest group whose main objective was to perpetuate the secret of an institution introduced by Eze Nri. It was an important instrument used by Nri men in the conduct of external affairs. The organization of this cult, whose sole purpose was based on a type of espionage, involved ways and means of collecting secret information, transmitting it and using it. But the effective operation of this cult depended on its membership and its relationship with the state councils.

#### **The Non-Traditional Groupings**

I have been discussing traditional groupings that have political relevance in Nri. There are also three non-traditional groupings which emerged in Nri between 1911 and 1972. They are the Nri Progress Union, often abbreviated to NPU, the various groupings based on non-traditional religions, and the local councils, now called the Community Council, which is an arm of the then East Central State Government of Nigeria.

#### *The Nri Progress Union*

The changed economy and increased employment opportunities outside Nri and especially outside the Igbo culture area between 1914 and 1940 encouraged many Nri men, as early as the 'twenties, to leave Nri town for some of the new and growing towns of Nigeria. The Nri men who lived in these towns founded what is now called a Nri Town

Union. As a reasonable number of these urban towns in Nigeria began to have Nri Town Unions, the necessity of having a central co-ordinating body became obvious.

About 1926, the first step towards having a Nri Union to deal with wider matters beyond local urban problems was taken by a group of Nri urban dwellers at Enugu, such as Messrs Igbunugo, Ochoifeoma and Oguodo. By the early 'thirties the Enugu Union emerged as a co-ordinator of all Nri Urban Unions. Enugu thus became the headquarters, with branches at Aba, Lagos, Kano, Bukuru, Warri, Onitsha and Nri.

In 1942 the Union undertook to settle the Eze Nri succession crisis, and in 1944 to resolve the Nri and Agulu land dispute. The Enugu Union therefore invited other urban branches to participate in deliberations. These two major crises brought all the urban unions together. Each sent their representatives to Nri in December 1944 and thus the first executive meeting of Nri Urban Unions, as they were then called, was held at Nri. This joint meeting of representatives of urban unions was named the Nri Progressive Union. In 1947 it was renamed the Nri Progress Union. The central co-ordinating union was based at Nri and its first President General and executive members were elected. (See Appendix 6).

At first, membership of the central union based at Nri was on the basis of lineage representation. One person was appointed to represent each lineage, as follows:

#### **Agukwu – Agbadana:**

- |                |                 |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Umu Agu     | Major lineage   |
| 2. Iru Anuta   | Minimal lineage |
| 3. Umu Nechi   | Major lineage   |
| 4. Umu Nrijofo | Major lineage   |

#### **Agukwu – Uruoji:**

- |                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. Umu Anuta     | Major lineage |
| 2. Umu Esono     | Major lineage |
| 3. Umu Nri Ebuzo | Major lineage |
| 4. Umu Nri Omalo | Major lineage |

#### **Agukwu – Obeagu:**

- |                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Umu Nri Obeagu | Major lineage   |
| 2. Umu Ezekamadu  | Major lineage   |
| 3. Umu Abanawara  | Minimal lineage |
| 4. Umu Mbe        | Minimal lineage |
| 5. Umu Ochogu     | Minimal lineage |

#### **Diodo:**

- |                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Umu Nri Namoke | Maximal lineage |
| 2. Umu Egbobe     | Major lineage   |

#### **Akamkpisi:**

- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Umu Diana       | Maximal lineage |
| 2. Agbana          | Major lineage   |
| 3. Enuora          | Major lineage   |
| 4. Umu Adika Nwoke | Maximal lineage |

In 1972, the central Nri Progress Union at Nri has a written constitution and a secretariat with a paid secretary based at Nri. The constitution provides for the election of officers by ballot or by a show of hands during the triennial meetings of all branches of Nri Progress Unions at Onitsha, Enugu, Abakaliki, Umuahia, Owerri, Aba, Calabar, Port Harcourt, Nsukka, Benin, Lagos, Ibadan, Zaria, Jos, Kaduna and Kano. The following offices are defined in the constitution: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Financial Secretary, Treasurer, Auditors, Provosts, Circular Bearers and Councillors. The duties of each office are clearly defined and the aims and objectives of the Union are 'To foster mutual understanding and unity among the elements of Nri Town and to effect necessary improvements in Nri Town.' (Rules & Regulations of NPU, pp. 1-9).

The Union has five types of meetings, i.e. triennial, annual meetings held in December, committee meeting held quarterly, general emergency meeting, and committee emergency meeting. The most powerful meeting is the triennial, in which all representatives of the Nri Progress Union in various towns in Nigeria meet at Nri to discuss matters, generally in December between Christmas and New Year. This is followed in importance by the annual meeting. But the executive committee seems to have the greatest influence on the people since the day-to-day running of the Union's activities is in the hands of its officers and it is they who interpret and execute the decisions reached in the various meetings.

The composition of the executive committee is defined as all elected officers of the Nri Progress Union, and twelve to eighteen members representing, in equal proportion, to the three wards of the town – called the 'six villages' in the constitution – i.e. Agukwu, Diodo and Akamkpisi. Recently, several permanent committees were formed to

take charge of specific duties with regard to development in Nri. These committees are: Education, Roads, Information, Sports, Eze Nri, Sanitation and Finance.

The Union's revenue is derived from annual collections and dues, fines, donations and funds raised by other approved methods. Membership of the Union is automatic and compulsory for any adult Nri man and there are many ways of making an individual comply – generally based on the imposition of graduated warnings and fines, followed by pressurizing the individual through his kin, and culminating in the social ostracism of the person from Nri until he turns over a new leaf. Turning over a new leaf involves payment of all fines owed to the Union and extra fines imposed as a punishment. The constitution specifies and enjoins that any urban town in Nigeria having up to five Nri men should have the Nri Progress Union established by any of the men, and a person who fails to become a member is liable to a fine of £2. 2s. each year he is not a member.

The relationship between the Union and other traditional and non-traditional groups is discussed in Chapter 8. Clearly, the Nri Progress Union operates a mixed system in which individuals are elected to office by voting as well as by the traditional system of representation based on

lineages. In Chapter 10 I show how the operation of these two systems allows the new elite of Nri and the traditional elite to accommodate one another in a union whose main objective is to transform Nri into a modern town.

#### *Non-Traditional Religious Groups*

The nine non-traditional religious groups in Nri are as follows: the Roman Catholic, the Church Missionary, the Cherubim and Seraphim, the Apostolic Church (also called Odozi-Obodo), St Peter's Sabbath, Christ Healing Sabbath, The Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Table 44 summarizes some of the statistical facts about the groups. In 1971 a little under 60% of the Nri population were nominally members of non-traditional religions. Of these the Roman Catholics accounted for 78%, the Church Missionary 17%, and others 8%. These figures do not take into account overlapping membership. Indeed it is difficult to define what church membership means in Nri, for over 55% of the people attend up to three different churches and over 85% of those who claim to adhere to a non-traditional religion had, at one time or another within the year of my investigation, participated in traditional rituals in one form or another.

Table 44 Non-Traditional Religions in Nri, 1971

Name of Religion	Sex of Leader	When Founded	Number of Men	Number of Women	Number of Children	TOTAL
Roman Catholic Mission	M	c. 1905-06	1,573	2,166	1,268	5,007
Church Missionary Society	M	c. 1910	300	400	400	1,100
Cherubim & Seraphim Church of Nigeria	M	c. 1949	?	?	?	?
Apostolic Church, Holy Prophets of God, Odozi-Obodo	M	1965	12	50	40	102
St Peter's Sabbath Mission	M	1967	108	170	80	358
Christ Healing Sabbath	F	1968	10	25	30	65
Christ Chosen Sabbath	M	1970	1	Nil	Nil	1
Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim & Seraphim	F	1971	5	9	6	20
Jehovah's Witnesses	M	?	?	?	?	?
TOTAL			2,009	2,820	1,824	6,653

Notes: 1. ? = figures not given. 2. The grand total of 6,653 means that a little under 60% of Nri people are nominally members of non-traditional religions. It must be noted that this figure includes children who account for about 58% of Nri population. 3. Of the grand total about 75% are Catholics, 17% Church Missionaries and the remaining 8% other religions.

Table 45 Percentage of Christians converted or re-converted to Traditional Religion, and those Traditionals converted to Christianity

Wards Lineages	Christians to Traditional	Traditional to Christians
Agukwu	28.7%	5.4%
Akamkpisi	32.0%	21.8%
Diodo	17.0%	—

The statistical figures in Table 45 show the percentage that changed over from traditional to non-traditional and vice-versa in 1971. Although there is a core of diehard members in each group, the total number on roll for the non-traditional religious groups is nevertheless highly variable.

Each of these religious groups is an interest group whose common interest is the Bible. Each interprets the Bible in a way designed to support its own conception of God, faith and morals. They oppose one another openly and vigorously criticize the practices and doctrines of the traditional religion. They have not been able to act collectively against the traditional religious group. But recently some militant groups, especially from the Roman Catholic and the Church Missionary groups, acted collectively to pressurize Eze Nri to proclaim that Christian women should not perform the traditional mortuary rites of their deceased husbands, which involve a visit to *Ajana*, one of the traditional supernatural beings. In Nri it is considered a great abomination for any women not to perform her husband's mortuary rites. To achieve this, the 'Joint Committee Meeting of all Christians in Nri', as it was called, staged a demonstration at the Eze Nri's palace and lodged their grievances. They also circulated pamphlets denouncing what they called the high-handedness of 'non-Christians', that is, those of the traditional religion. The Eze Nri Council issued a statement that traditional mortuary rites will continue to be a Nri custom and of course non-traditional religious groups in Nri are free to exercise their choice of religion. The struggle continues as far as the non-traditional groups are concerned.

These religious pressure groups are not kinship based. Indeed, in a typical simple family unit the father belongs to the traditional groups, the mother to the Roman Catholic and the elder son some mid-way between traditional and non-traditional. Similarly, members of the lineages of the various levels belong to different religious

groups; although it is noticed that certain lineages are predominantly Catholic or Church Missionary because influential leaders of the lineages are of those religious denominations. Umu Mbe minimal lineage is a typical example of a case where about 70% of Christians are Church Missionaries because of the influence of one of its prominent leaders. But cases in which husbands and wives and children belong to different religions are statistically higher than cases in which all members belong to one religious group.

It is of course very important to add that these differences in religious persuasion have insignificantly affected the unity of the lineages or of the town. This is because of the differences in the variety of beliefs held by individuals of the same lineage. Also in time of crisis, when the whole town is split into non-traditional religious groups against the traditional religious groups, the Eze Nri is regarded as the 'father' of all.

#### *The Community Council*

A local government system was introduced to Igbo land in about 1905 and since then has undergone various changes (see Chapter 10). In its recent form it is called the Community Council. This Council is an arm of the then East Central State local government system. The personnel of these councils are theoretically elected on a lineage basis and on ability and skill in public affairs. One person is assigned to each of the lineages, as indicated above.

In fact lineage members appoint a person from their lineage to represent their interests. But those appointed, with very few exceptions, are residual or less active leaders, for the cream of the lineage leadership are already members of the other political groups associated either with the palace or with the Nri Progress Union, which carry more prestige and satisfaction than being a Community Councillor.

The Community Council has a secretary and a chairman. The members of the Council represent not only the lineage interest but also that of Nri, since discussion and decisions taken at the Community Council meetings are those that affect the town as a whole.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: NOTES

1. D. KUPER and A. RICHARD, Edited *Councils in Action*, 1971, pp. 1-3 and 13-28.

The definition of a council as suggested by Audrey Richard seems too broad. It includes all types of groupings with limited membership getting together regularly in one place to discuss certain matters. It seems this broad definition has forced Adam Kuper to talk of elite council, arena council and community-in-council. Applying Audrey Richard's definition, all corporate groups that meet regularly in a place to deliberate on certain matters are councils. In Nri, age-grades have similar structural arrangements as the *ndi nze* or *nzemabua* council, but I would hesitate to call age-grade meetings council meetings.

It seems that if the term 'council' has any analytic use (I doubt it has), then this might be precise in order to exclude some forms of groupings that meet regularly in a place to deliberate, but may not be described as a council. The

important criterion that may probably mark out a council from other forms of political groupings is that councils are composed of representatives drawn from a wider public or a section of a wider public. Thus in Nri the age-grade *amulununo* and *dibia* meetings are not councils, while *Nzamabua* and *Ndi Nze* are councils.

2. Three terms seem current in anthropological usage: age-set, age-grade and age-group. I prefer using age-set and age-grade. The set refers to a body of persons, that is the group, and the grade is the status attained. In the Nri case, three age-sets make an age-grade.

3. M.A. ONWUEJEOGWU, *The Cult of the Bori Spirits Among the Hausa*, 1969, pp. 279-305.

Igbo people conceptualize the spirit world as a mirror image of their society. (see Chapter 3). This mode of conceptualization is common in West Africa. It occurs among the Hausa.

## Chapter 8

# Politics and Government in Nri

In Chapters 6 and 7 I discussed the structure of the various political groupings in Nri and in Chapter 5 the structure of leadership. In this Chapter I want to consider how members of these various groupings, especially the leaders, generate political action by using either religious or economic instruments, or both, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. In Figure 13 I have attempted to show the structural relationship between the groupings discussed in Chapter 6 and 7 in terms of membership and flow of communication. The diagram shows that a man can be a member of several political groupings at a time, and this makes the flow of communication between groups possible. I shall later demonstrate that individuals tend to be more loyal to the group or groups that best serve their interest.

I have decided to examine political action in Nri from two standpoints. First as an aspect of power struggles between and within languages, and between other types of political groupings.<sup>1</sup> In some cases the principal contestants since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have been recruited from the same named lineages. In Chapter 9 I will show how power struggles between Nri and other settlements dominated Nri external affairs in the past.

Secondly, I will examine political action as an aspect of making binding decisions.<sup>2</sup> These two aspects of political action involve, to certain degrees, claims and demands on the one hand, and processes of rule application, rule-making and rule adjudication on the other.<sup>3</sup>

It is not possible to cover the whole range of political activity in Nri, but some of the following examples will illustrate the main trends and associated forms.

## Political Action in Nri as an Aspect of Power Struggle

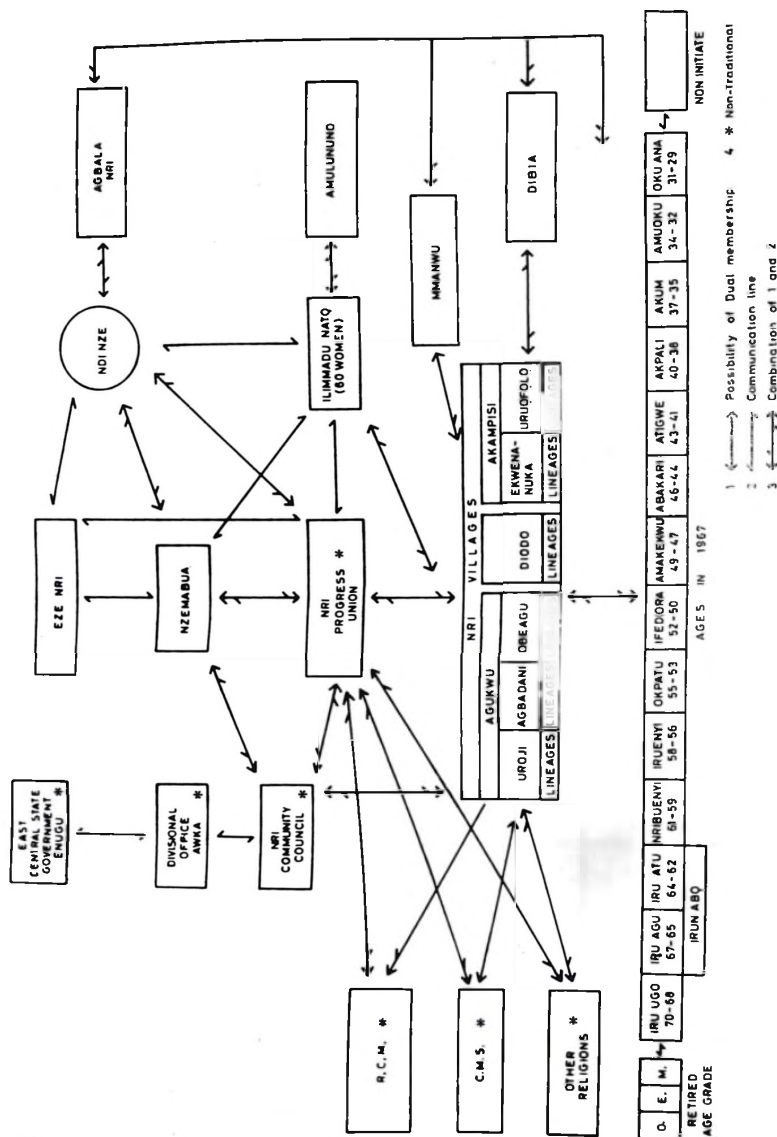
### *Conflicts Among the Lineages and Temple Holders*

In the early history of Agukwu discussed in Chapter 2 and further explained in Chapter 6, I pointed out that Onyiora, the founder of Agbadana maximal lineage, was said to be the first son of Nri Ifikuanim and so senior to his brother Alikenri, the founder of Uruoji maximal lineage. But Alikenri took the *ozo* title first and thus inherited the *ofo-ozo* and the temple of Nri Ifikuanim.

Alikenri was said to have two sons: the first was Ukabia who was followed by Anuta. Ukabia took his father's cow and sold it. This was considered an abomination. Ukabia was ostracized and he left Nri, and Anuta was made the first son, *okpala*, and he inherited the *ofo-ozo* and temple of Nri Ifikuanim and Alikenri. Since then the *ofo* and temple have been inherited by promogeniture down the generations to Abana Ikedigwe of Umu Uho Uruoji. After Abana's death, in the mid-sixties, his first son, Betrand, became the heir. Betrand's father's brother, Agueni, a non-titled *ozo* man, began to act for Betrand who was still young and also a Christian.

In the first quarter of the eighteenth century, during the lifetime of Mmutanwunya (the renowned traditional medicine man and diviner in Nri), the Umu Anuta major lineage (see Genealogy Chart, Figure 9) had segmented into three minor lineages, but all were under the leadership of Mmutanwunya. He was from Umu Uho minimal lineage and was also the holder of the *ofo* and the temple of Nri Ifikuanim for all Agukwu, and that of Alikenri for all Uruoji. As Mmutanwunya was growing older and losing his vitality he was not able to cope with

Figure 13. Nri (Igbo) Political Structure



the administration of the various temples in Umu Anuta. During one of the busiest ritual months in Nri, called *Onwa Asato*, the eighth month of the Nri traditional calendar, Mmutanwunya was to offer sacrifices in all the temples in Umu Anuta. He started his round with Umu Uho and then went to Umu Aguolu Ifem. The lineage members of Umu Nri Alike, which had produced an Eze Nri a generation before Mmutanwunya, were impatient and could not wait for the old man to arrive. The head of Umu Nri Alike, called Chinwufe, decided to perform the sacrifices, which were the responsibility of Mmutanwunya, without obtaining permission. When the old man arrived he found to his astonishment that Chinwufe had done his job. Enraged, he struck his *ozo* spear-staff into the ground and cursed: 'The head is head, the tail is tail, since the tail separates, let it always be on the run.' Since then the minor segments of the major lineage of Umu Anuta have had their own leaders. It was a religious curse and nothing could be done about it because the old man refused to nullify his curse. The two lineages began to attend the collective temples of Nri Alike separately, but when all Agukwu or Uruoji come to this temple, including Umu Nri Alike, Umu Uho officiates. Since then, the relationship between Umu Nri Alike and Umu Uho has always been uneasy.

By 1920 it happened that for the first time Umu Nri Alike had several *ozo*-titled men while Umu Uho had none. By this accident, the leadership of Umu Anuta in terms of the *ozo* title was vested in the *isi nze* of Umu Anuta, who belonged to Umu Nri Alike. According to Nri custom, the sacrifices to be made in the temple of Nri Ifikuanim-Alikenri should be made by the *isi nze* from Umu Nri Alike in a temple under the custody of Umu Uho. By this time the custodian of the temple of Umu Uho was Abana Ikedigwe. Abana insisted that the ritual tributes, *ife nru*, should be his since he was the head and custodian of the founding temple. The *isi nze* of Umu Nri Alike disagreed. Umu Nri Alike got the support of Umu Ukabia then attached to Umu Nri Ebuzo, who were disputing the right of Umu Uho since their return to Nri. But Umu Nri Apia of Umu Nriebuzo supported Umu Uho, because they had not forgotten how in the late 17th century Nri Alike challenged their father, Nri Apia, in the political contest to become Eze Nri. Thus in this struggle one section of the major lineage of Nri Alike was supported by a section of

the major lineage of Umu Nri Ebuzo against the other half of the major lineage of Nri Alike supported by the other half of Umu Nri Ebuzo. In other words, the two major lineages were internally divided against each other.

Abana took the matter to the court of *Nzemabua* in Eze Nri's palace. The decision reached was that the *isi nze* must officiate in the collective temple of Nri Ifikuanim-Alikenri for all Agukwu, and that the *ife nru* should be given to the *ozo* man. Abana was not satisfied. By then the British had established courts in Eastern Nigeria and Nri was included in the Agulu court area. Eze Nri Obalike had bluntly refused to attend this court when he was appointed. Abana took the matter to the Agulu court area and the court upheld the decision reached by the *Nzemabua* court in Nri.

Another facet of this conflict emerged in 1929, when the British introduced the payment of 10% of tax collected from a town to the holder of the founding *ofo* and temple of a town. The British erroneously concluded that such men were the traditional heads of the towns in Igboland. In Nri this money was paid to Abana Ikedigwe of Umu Uho, Uruoji. This created another political dispute in Nri.

Since Nri town was founded at various periods by different persons, such a payment to Abana amounted to recognition that only Agukwu existed; Diodo and Akamkpisi having been, in effect, counted out. Also, the *isi nze* of Agukwu was Odenigbo of Uruoji, of Umu Nri Omalo major lineage and of Umu Alike Ogalanya minimal lineage. Odenigbo was not a man who would sit down and see his leadership flouted by anyone. He was wealthy, he was *isi nze* and highly respected in Nri as a dynamic intelligent man, knowledgeable in Nri traditions. Odenigbo rightly pointed out that Ikedigwe was the custodian of the temple of Nri Ifikuanim-Alikenri which only belongs to Agukwu, that Ikedigwe was not the leader both in Nri and Uruoji because he was not an *ozo* man and that he, Odenigbo, was the *isi nze* and therefore the leader of *Ndi Nze* and *Nzemabua*. He took the matter to the Agulu court, which upheld his claim. But by then the British administration had rescinded the payment of ten per cent.

Until now Umu Uho is regarded as the minimal lineage, with the custodianship of the *ofo* and temple of Agukwu. However, its position of leadership can only be asserted and felt if it has an



ozo man whose position is high in the ozo hierarchy, both in Umu Anuta and in Uruoji. In 1967, this was not the case.

While this struggle was raging between Umu Uho and Umu Nri Alike, both of the major lineages of Umu Anuta, another was going on between Umu Anuta as a whole, against Umu Ukabia of Umu Nri Ebuzo on the one hand, and between Umu Nri Apia of Umu Nri Ebuzo and Umu Ukabia also of Umu Nri Ebuzo major lineage on the other hand. I have pointed out that Ukabia, the first son of Alikenri, the founder of Uruoji, was ostracized and divested of his rights to become first son, *okpala*, and that Anuta the second son was made first son. Members of Ukabia lineage returned from exile many generations after the death of their father Alikenri and settled beside Umu Nri Ebuzo. Ebuzo, the founder, was a junior brother of Ukabia and had really accompanied Ukabia into exile, but returned earlier. By then Umu Nri Ebuzo had been fully established as a major lineage. Umu Ukabia became attached to Nri Ebuzo as a minimal lineage. Later, around the last quarter of the eighteenth century, it is said that Umu Aguochie, an outside lineage, became attached to Umu Nri Ebuzo as a minimal lineage.

During the reign of Nri Ewenetem (about 1724-1794, genealogical dating) Umu Ukabia made two attempts to regain their senior status in Uruoji but failed. Between 1914-1915, after the death of Onuorah, who was the *isi nze* of Umu Nri Ebuzo and the custodian of the *ofo* and temple of Umu Nri Ebuzo, the custody of the temple fell to Obidike. But in 1915 Ikeagu of Umu Aguochie became *isi nze* in Umu Nri Ebuzo and began to officiate in the temple of Umu Nri Ebuzo and claimed the *ife nru*. Obidike sued him in Agulu court and the court fined Ikeagu £7 for usurping Obidike's right.

In 1938, Ofora of Umu Aguochie became *isi nze* and began to claim the *ife nru*, but the Umu Nri Apia custodianship of the temple began to protest. In 1939 a counter-protest was championed by Anunwa and Odogwu of Umu Ukabia in support of Ofora's claim. They argued that the Umu Nri Apia were unfair in dealing with Ofora, and demanded that the temple of Umu Ukabia should be completely detached from Umu Nri Ebuzo. This argument continued until 1962, when the matter was brought before the *isi nze* of Uruoji

maximal lineage. Uruoji decided that the temple was under the custody of the first son, who should be given the *ife nru*.

In 1965, a new leader emerged from Umu Ukabia, D. Ikeagu, a relation of the Ikeagu of 1915. D. Ikeagu was a wealthy and successful man who took the *ozo* title and became *isi nze* of Umu Nri Ebuzo. Onuorah, who was acting for Okeke as the custodian of the temple of Nri Ebuzo, invited D. Ikeagu to officiate in the temple. D. Ikeagu demanded the ritual tribute, *ife nru*. Onuorah refused and made the sacrifice. A few days later D. Ikeagu sued Onuorah in the Udoka customary court. This act was regarded as too high-handed, for it ignored the Eze Nri court and the Nri Progress Union. The NPU stepped in and obtained permission from the court to settle the matter. The court granted permission.

During this period Umu Ukabia made a terrible political blunder which cost them popular support. They were alleged to have bought a cow and returned the cow to Umu Anuta, saying: 'This is the cow our father took away.' Umu Anuta replied: 'Go and give the cow directly to our father, Alikenri!' An emergency general meeting of the NPU, chaired by M.O. Mbolu, the General President, began their hearing on 1st August 1965, and on 22nd August the NPU gave its decision, as follows: We, the entire citizens of Nri unanimously agree that from this day throughout Nri the Head Nze of each family will be allowed or is to officiate at all Idol shrines and *Irumuoh* ceremonies and all *Efenru* from that will be his own; but *Efenru* from any *Obu* must be given to whoever is in charge of that *Obu* no matter how little the occupant of that *Obu* is.'

D. Ikeagu refused to accept the decision unless an oath was taken by Onuorah. But Onuorah accepted the decision. Nri town accepted the decision. In 1972 the position was that some Umu Ukabia regarded themselves as an autonomous unit, but Nri still regarded them as a minimal lineage under the aegis of Umu Nri Ebuzo. This decision attempted to draw a line between the rights and duties of the *isi nze* as the head of either the maximal or major or minor or minimal lineage, and the rights of the custodian of the collective temple.

By this decision, D. Ikeagu was accepted as the leader of Umu Nri Ebuzo, who must officiate in all the shrines, hold the *ife nru*, and officiate in the collective temple, but who must leave the *ife nru* to the custodian of the founding temple. In the Diodo section of the town similar conflicts occurred, but space prevents their inclusion here.

#### *Conflicts among the Ozo Alliance Group*

In Uru Ofolo, Akamkpisi, the maximal lineage of Umu Adikwanwoke had three major lineages. These were Umu Ugwu, Umu Okpobe and Umu Okeishi. Okeishi was the holder of the temple and the *ofo* of Adikwanwoke until he abdicated his role and left to settle with Umu Mbe in Obeagu. When Okeishi left, the leadership of the temple of Adikwanwoke was open to competition between the lineages founded by the other two brothers, Umu Agwu and Umu Okpobe. This struggle has undergone several stages.

#### First stage (see Genealogy Chart, Figure 10)

At first the whole of Uru Ofolo, that is Umu Adikwanwoke, Uzo Achalla and Uru Ezika Ogbalite, which are now all maximal lineages, organized their *ozo* together. The struggle began when a man called Ogbundende, brother of Unukpo, of the minimal lineage of Umu Agwubike of the minor lineage of Umu Nwaua of the major lineage of Umu Ugwu (both probably lived in the second half of the eighteenth century), was taking the *ozo* title for their *ozo* group. It happened that Umu Okpobe had more *ozo* men than other lineages in the *ozo* group, so they contrived to suppress the items of payment made by Ogbundende. He was strong and influential and decided to stop what he considered a dishonest act. He persuaded Nwaka Uzegbu, the *isi nze* of Umu Ugwu, the *isi nze* of Umu Okpatulu and Adujo of Agbana, Nneali of Enuorah and that of Umu Diana, to rebel against the action of Umu Okpobe's leaders. They all agreed and formed a new *ozo* alliance, based upon an *Alusi* oath. The oath was buried so that no one would be able to abrogate it in future. Ogbundende took the *ozo* title for the new *ozo* group in whose formation he played a major role. Thus two *ozo* groups emerged:

#### *Group A:*

Umu Ugwu – Major lineage of Umu Adikwanwoke in Uru Ofolo.

Umu Okpatulu – Maximal lineage in Uzo Achalla and Uru Ofolo.

Agbana – Major lineage in Ekwenanuka.

Enuora – Major lineage in Ekwenanuka.

Umu Diana – Maximal lineage in Umu Diana.

#### *Group B:*

Umu Okpobe – Major lineage of Umu Adikwanwoke in Uru Ofolo.

Umu Ezika Ogbalite – Maximal lineage in Uruofolo.

Umu Ugwu and Umu Okpobe were sons of Adikwanwoke. Although they were quarrelling with each other, they accepted the leadership of one *isi nze* whether the leader hailed from Umu Ugwu or Umu Okpobe.

#### Second stage

The *ozo* alliance group that was formed in the eighteenth century as mentioned above, was subjected to another crisis in the later part of the century. This time the crisis began when Itilu Ajagwu of Umu Nwaua of Umu Ugwu, the son of Ogbundende, took the title of *amanwulu* for his own son. He refused to pay the sum of 6,000 cowries to Agbana, Enuorah, Umu Diana and Ukpatalu, according to the rules laid down when the new *ozo* alliance was formed. Obiaguyim of Umu Nwaua, an influential *ozo* man of Umu Ugwu, persuaded Ajagwu to pay. But one Uzoegbo, the *isi nze* of Umu Nwakwu, did not like the whole character of the alliance in which Umu Ugwu had to pay members of the alliance such a huge sum in order to entice them to stay in the alliance. Uzoegbo argued that the sum must not be paid. He felt so strongly about it that he persuaded the whole of Umu Nwaku and Umu Ajagwu, all of Umu Agwu and Umu Okpatulu to support him. He got the support and they broke away from the *ozo* group A above and founded another *ozo* group, C. Thus at the turn of the eighteenth century Uru Ofolo had three *ozo* groups, viz:

<i>Group A</i>	<i>Group B</i>	<i>Group C</i>
Umu Ugwu	Umu Okpobe	Umu Nwaku
Agbana	Umu Ezika Ogbalite	Umu Ajagwu
Enuora		Umu Okpatulu
Umu Diana		

By 1966 the whole of Group C was no longer viable as an *ozo* group because the numbers

taking the title declined. Then, through the influence and persuasion of Okike Ocha, all members of Group C allied with Group B and thus emerged the two *ozo* alliance groups that now exist, as shown in Table 35.

### Third stage

Since this struggle began in the eighteenth century, all members of Umu Adikwanwoke maximal lineage accepted the leadership of one *isi nze*. The whole of groups A, B and C performed together certain ceremonies connected with the *ozo* title. This ceremony was called *Ego abacha*.

In 1960 another dimension was introduced into the quarrel as a result of a recent struggle between Atuanya of Umu Nwaua of Umu Ugwu and Okeke Ocha of Umu Okpobe. A crisis developed when Nnebedum of Umu Nwaua took the *ozo* title and paid a sum for *Abacha* rites. Members of the combined groups B and C refused to accept the money. They insisted that Nnebedum should take the *ozo* title for their group. The group reported Ekwunife Oraeki in the court of *Ndi Nze*, because Ekwunife was Nnebedum's representative at Nri, since he was away from Nri.

Atuanya, the *isi nze* of Umu Nwaua and the legitimate *isi nze* of Umu Adikwanwoke and now the head of group A, supported his men Nnebedum and Ekwunife. According to Atuanya, he upheld the alliance formed by Ogbundende in the mid-eighteenth century because it was based on an oath, but at the same time he took this opportunity to strengthen his claim to leadership.

The *Nze* court was presided over by the *isi nze*, a retired police inspector named J.B.N. Onyeso. It was decided that since the *ozo* title is associated with an *ozo* group and since an *ozo* group is a free contractual group, Nnebedum should pay his title fee to the group to which his lineage was a rightful member, group A. According to this decision, neither Atuanya nor Okeke had his wishes fulfilled. The decision simply re-enforced the *status quo*. Then Okeke precipitated another crisis, which brings us to the fourth and dangerous stage.

### Fourth stage

Okeke Ocha, the *isi nze* of Umu Okpobe major lineage, carried the dispute from the *ozo* alliance group into the maximal lineage temple. Okeke was alleged to have persuaded Umu Nwaku and Umu Ajagwu minor lineages of Umu Ugwu to

break off from the leadership of Umu Ugwu and join his group Umu Okpobe in attending the temple of Adikwanwoke under Okeke's leadership. This is contrary to the Nri concept of leadership of the maximal lineage, for as Atuanya is the *isi nze* in the maximal lineage of Adikwanwoke he should be the leader and holder of the *ofa* and the temple. Atuanya could have taken the matter to the *Ndi Nze* court but he strongly upheld the view that, since the original *ofa* was in his possession, Okeke's acts in the temple were useless and sooner or later the ancestors would teach him how to behave. As for Okeke Ocha, he argued that when Agbata of Umu Orimkpu was *isi nze* of Umu Adikwanwoke, Atuanya, who was second-in-command, usurped the leadership and he was now doing the same to him. He believed the ancestors would be delighted; Atuanya on the other hand denied this allegation, saying that Okeke was confusing temple and lineage matters with the formation of an *ozo* alliance group. Thus the struggle that began in the mid-eighteenth century continues and with each outbreak the unity of the maximal lineage of Umu Adikwanwoke is threatened.

### Conflict Arising from the Control of Cults

In Chapter 6 I examined the roles of the various lineages in terms of the control of cults. The distribution of these roles among lineages has also been discussed. In many cases arguments as to which lineages should control which specific cults give rise to struggles between or among competing lineages and leaders. An example from Agukwu will illustrate this point.

The *Alusi* called *Ngene* Uruoji is believed to be under the custody of the four major lineages of Uruoji maximal lineage, that is Umu Anuta, Umu Esonu, Umu Nri Ebuzo and Umu Nri Omalo. This means that the *isi nze* of Uruoji will also be the chief priest who hold the *ofa* of the *Alusi* and so all gifts to the *Alusi* are given to the chief priest. For over a century the *isi nze* of Uruoji had always been from Umu Anuta and so the chief priest was always from Umu Anuta. When Odenigbo of Umu Nri Omalo became *isi nze* in the early 'twenties, Umu Anuta began to say that Nri Omalo major lineage must not provide the chief priest of the *Ngene* Uruoji. Odenigbo gave examples of well known members of Nri Omalo who had been chief priests of the *Ngene*. He took the matter to the

Agulu court, where he was asked to swear on an *Alusi* oath with thirteen members of his lineage that this statement and these claims were correct. He and thirteen others swore and he died a very old man. Nwaokoye, the son of Odenigbo, argued that in future before any *isi nze* from Umu Esona or Umu Nri could become the chief priest of *Ngene* their lineage, Umu Nri Omalo, would demand that the person swear that members of his lineage are also entitled to be the chief priest.

Swearing on oath with thirteen others, called *isa nabo*, is not an easy procedure in Nri judicial process. It means one has to persuade and convince thirteen other members of one's lineage that one's claims are just and reasonable in terms of the interests of the lineage. Under such pressure other members may decide to challenge this and therefore the lineage divides into factions or groups. In a Nri dispute, closely related lineages are prepared to ally with distantly related lineages, whose interests are also at stake, to fight against another closely related lineage whose interests conflict with theirs. It boils down to the fact that swearing with thirteen others involves a lot of campaigning and recruitment of support which may or may not be successful, depending upon many factors.

#### *Conflicts Among the Royal Descent Group*

In Chapter 6 I discussed the structure of the royal lineage groups, the unification of Diodo and Agukwu kingship, and the principles of circulating kingship. I pointed out that Nri people will say: 'Nri kingship is not contestable.' In short, this is only an oblique way of stressing a religious belief that Eze Nri is selected by the spirits of *Nri Menri* who inspire, preserve and guide the aspirant.

Nevertheless, the history of Nri records four major succession disputes, the first occurring probably in the late seventeenth century, the second and third in the eighteenth century and the fourth between 1933 and 1944.

#### *The 17th Century Conflict*

According to Nri history, this conflict was between Nri Apia of Nri Ebuzo and Nri Alike of Umu Anuta, all of Uruoji maximal lineage. Both Eze Nri Alike and Nri Apia ruled together for about twenty years and both were said to have died on the same traditional week day, one on *Oye* and the other on *Eke*. The reigns of these Eze Nri continue

to arouse controversy in two respects; who was the legitimate king, and which Eze Nri received the *ofo-Nri* and *alo-Nri* from Nri Agu, who had abandoned Nri during his reign?

Nri politicians have several ways of resolving the problem. One group argues that Umu Nri Anuta lineage had no constitutional right to produce an Eze Nri, because they are the lineage founded by the first son, *Okpala*. This alone, they argue, nullified Nri Alike's claim. Nri Apia, they say, was from a lineage founded by the youngest son and had the right to be Eze Nri. By this argument the right king of Nri should be Nri Apia. Another group argues that the ways of the spirits are not the ways of men, for the spirits might have decided to change the rule of succession. They hold that Umu Nri Alike was the most junior lineage in the major lineage of Umu Anuta, and that after all Umu Anuta was not the first son by birth. He was 'made' first son by their father, Alikenri, instead of Ukabia who was banished for taking away his father's cow.

Since both were crowned by the Umu Diana lineage, and since only they could know where the *ofo-Nri* and *alo-Nri* were and to whom they gave these staffs, it seems the Umu Diana alone could resolve the problem of legitimacy. The Umu Diana elders say that in times of conflict they generally hide the original *ofo* and *alo* and give both contestants a fake *ofo* and *alo*, which both should use for the spiritual confrontation. In this case both rule together, and the one with the greatest spiritual support and influence will attract the greatest number of followers and will ultimately outlive the one with less spiritual and temporal support. They then argue that since Nri Apia and Nri Alike died in the same week, as both predicted, it means the spirits gave both equal power to rule.

Technically, using the *ofo* and *alo* as criteria of legitimacy, one may argue that Nri during this period had no Eze Nri. But no Nri traditional politician will entertain such an argument. Rather they will argue that they had two kings ruling at the same time and that this was bad. However, it happened again between 1933 and 1944.

#### *The 18th Century Conflict*

After the murder of Nri Ezimilo at the end of the first quarter of the eighteenth century, Agbadana maximal lineage gave out propaganda in Igboland,



persuading Igbo settlements to bring pressure to bear on the council of *Nzemabua* in Nri to appoint the son of Nri Ezimilo as the next Eze Nri or to face up to the ritual consequences of famine due to the bad death of Eze Ezimilo. Many Igbo settlements sent their leaders to Nri. The *Nzemabua* succumbed to the pressure and proclaimed Ewenetem Eze Nri. For the first time the succession of Eze Nri passed from father to son without a coronation ceremony other than the handing over of the *ofo* and *alo* to Ewenetem.

Nri Ewenetem died and the second struggle began. The son of Nri Ewenetem, Nwamkpo, declared that he was under spiritual inspiration to become Eze Nri. Enweleana of Umu Ezekammadu of Obeagu maximal lineage challenged him on the grounds that it was Obeagu's turn to produce a candidate. He proclaimed that he, too, had been inspired. The whole of Nri was furious with Nwamkpo for his claim, because they saw it as an attempt to perpetuate kingship in one lineage and thus create a dynasty based on the succession of father to son, contrary to the rule laid down during the reign of Nribuife. At once the *Ndi Nze* council acted. They unanimously proclaimed Nwamkpo as an impostor and stripped him of his *ozo* title. He was further fined twenty cows. Nwamkpo paid the fine and before he was able to re-take the *ozo* title Enweleana had become Eze Nri. Thus ended the second crisis.

### 20th Century Conflict

The background of this struggle was given in Chapter 2 in the section dealing with the reign of Eze Nrijofo II. In 1931 Okpoko of Umu Nri Obeagu proclaimed himself inspired and was crowned Eze Nri in 1935 by the Umu Diana after his visit to Aguleri. Similarly, Tabansi of Umu Nri Agbadana proclaimed himself inspired in 1934 and was crowned Eze Nri in 1937 by Umu Diana after going to Aguleri. But the conflict was not as straightforward as this.

Inside Nri, Okpoko-Mebuge won over the support of all Obeagu which was his own maximal lineage, especially Umu Ochogu, a powerful force in Nri politics. The Diodo section of the town supported Okpoko because he was the descendant of Nribuife, the direct inheritor of Diodo kingship, and Okpoko was a classificatory sister's son. Similarly, Akamkpisi supported him because they were in sympathy with Diodo.

The Agbadana maximal lineage was against Okpoko's claims because they held that it was not Obeagu's but Agbadana's turn to produce an Eze Nri. Indeed, according to the rotational principle, it was Agbadana's turn since Obeagu produced Eze Nri Enweleana who was succeeded by Nri Obalike of Uruoji. Okpoko, they said, argued that since the merger of Diodo and Agukwu kingship, Obeagu had produced only two kings whilst Uruoji and Agbadana had produced five each. This argument is wrong in the light of Nri oral tradition which lists only twelve kings between Nribuife and Nri Obalike, including the last two. Of these, three were from Obeagu, four from Uruoji. The Agbadana case, in which Nri Ezimilo was succeeded by his son, made Agbadana appear to have supplied one Eze Nri more than Obeagu.

Uruoji maximal lineage rallied round the minimal lineage of the former Eze Nri Obalike to protect the infringement of the interregnum, since Okpoko declared his inspiration three years after the death of Obalike. They also recognized that it was the turn of Agbadana and refused to allow the Adama lineage to remove the *Ofo-Nri Menri* and the *Alo-Nri Menri* from the palace of the former Eze Nri. Nri town was split into three: the supporters of Okpoko, the supporters of Tabansi and those of the Uruoji people. Thus the *Ndi Nze* and *Nzemabua* were divided. The lineage structure provided a solution. The maximal lineages performed most of the functions of the state, since the two palaces were serving the different factions of the town.

Persuaded by Okpoko, Ogbu Atu of Umu Nribuife sued Okolo Obalike, the son of the late Eze Nri Obalike of Alike Ogalanya lineage of Uruoji, in the native court or judicial council of Nri. The summons reads: 'Recovery of "*ofo* and *alo*" which were awarded the *dfdt's* late Father-Obealike, in his kingship by the former king Nri Enweleana according to the native custom since 47 years ago: Issued at Nri the 9th day of January 1939.'<sup>15</sup> This summons failed to yield results. The *ofo* and *alo* were never given to Okpoko.

Before the coronation of Okpoko, Uruoji people refused to hand over the *ofo* and *alo*. The Umu Diana crowned Okpoko and gave him a temporary *ofo* and *alo*. Similarly, when Tabansi was crowned he was given a temporary *ofo* and *alo*. In 1944 the Uruoji people through the Umu Diana transferred to Nri Tabansi the *ofo* and *alo* that Nri Obalike

received from Nri Enweleana. In 1947 Okpoko died and later the Nri Progress Union pronounced his kingship null and void. Thus ended the struggle which was considered damaging to the reputation of Nri.

*Conflict between the Amulununo, the NPU and Other Groups*

The *amulununo* group had been weakened by the 1930–32 crisis and the group tried to recover from this around 1940, but by 1960 further cleavages began to occur. On the whole, the group has always been weakened by organizational problems. After the Civil War in 1970 a series of events happened in Nri that brought this group into effective action once more. One woman killed her husband and the police arrested her. Later another woman killed the mother of her husband and the police arrested her. Later another killed her baby conceived during the period of performing the mortuary rites of her husband. All these acts are classified as taboos and to break them is an abomination, even though they are also police cases. But one common trend about these offences, which are regarded as abominations, was that they were committed by young *amulununo*, that is young Nri women who have married Nri men and should therefore know more about the customs of Nri.

The diviners began to forecast a gloomy future to those who consulted them. The *mmanwu* ritual masks during the *onwa agwu*, the month of display, began to sing and chant about these evils, jeering and mocking at the *amulununo*.

In 1970–71 the *amulununo* began to regroup again. The traditional ones visited all the *Alusi* in Nri, dancing, singing and pleading that all abominations committed during the Nigerian Civil War should be cleansed. In Nri it is believed that abomination breeds abomination, *alu na mu alu*. The new wave of *alu* was attributed to the unpurified *alu* committed by women during the Nigerian Civil War. The *amulununo* drafted rules to guide married women. These rules included Nri taboos related to married life. The draft was alleged to have been sent to the NPU and it was later alleged that the secretary did not present the draft to the NPU for ratification.

Then in 1972 one *amulununo*, R. Okeke, pushed down the 'wall' of her neighbour during a quarrel. This was pronounced an abomination. The *amul-*

*ununo* acted immediately by banning the woman from attending their meetings until she rebuilt the wall. She did not and was expelled. The rules of the *amulununo* state that expulsion from *amulununo* also implies expulsion from the age-grade. The woman expelled was of Akum age-grade. One day the Akum age-grade had a feast and the expelled woman attended it. The *amulunuo* from Akamkpisi ordered the woman to leave. She refused, saying that *amulununo* had no authority in the age-grade. The Agukwu *amulununo* in the Akum age-grade seemed to support her so the Akamkpisi *amulununo* walked out of the age-grade.

The *amulununo* group met, invited the Akum age-grade and questioned them. The men's section declared that they were ignorant of the *amulununo*'s rules. The *amulununo* who knew of the rules and remained in the feast were fined £1 1s each, but they refused to pay. The *amulununo* expelled them from their group. Another woman called Mmankwo, who was alleged to have encouraged the woman who pushed down the wall to attend the age-grade meeting, was fined £2 2s. She refused to pay and was also expelled. Meanwhile Mmankwo was found guilty of other offences for which she was fined. The fines imposed on her totalled £5 5s.

The NPU was disturbed by this because the *amulununo*'s action encroached on the age-grade organization. The NPU convened an Executive Committee meeting and invited the *amulununo* and the chairmen and women of all the age-grades. The heads of the *amulununo* stated their case, but others involved were not given a chance to state their case.

The NPU Committee gave the following decisions: (a) the *Amulununo* association could continue to function, (b) the case of the woman who pushed down the wall should be referred to Umu Nri of Agbadana and to Eze Nri for settlement and she should pay £1 1s to *amulununo* and be readmitted, (c) the other *amulununo* women who were fined £1 1s should not pay because they were ordered by the males of their age-grade to ignore the rule of *amulununo*, (d) Mmankwo was not guilty of any offence, (e) all rules made by *amulununo* must be submitted to the Executive Committee for approval or disapproval. Lastly, the Executive also made a donation of £5 5s to the *amulununo*.

Two days later the *amulununo* group revoked the decision of the NPU Executive. They did not understand why the NPU should donate £5 5s to them instead of giving it to Mmankwo to pay her fine. They also said that they had not fined the woman who pushed down the wall but had ordered her to rebuild it. They questioned the validity of a decision that was reached without both sides of the matter being heard.

The NPU wanted to play down the matter. Twelve days later the Executive got Mmankwo to apologize to the *amulununo* with six gallons of palm wine and kola nut, but the *amulununo* refused, insisting that Mmankwo must pay. This infuriated the NPU Executive. The NPU insisted that their decision must be implemented, but the *amulununo* bluntly refused. The NPU threatened them and they accepted the challenge. It was clear that the Executive Committee had mishandled the matter. The struggle began.

The first move of the NPU was to split the *amulununo* group by absorbing them into their respective age-grades. So during the planning of the *igu aro* ceremony, which is always a big public day in Nri, the *alumununo* group was ignored and was not included in the list as a group that would go and pay homage to Eze Nri. Instead, it was planned that each *amulununo* must join her respective age-grade to pay homage to Eze Nri. The *amulununo* got this information secretly and planned a showdown for that day which would have been very embarrassing. The NPU heard of the plan and quickly placed their name on the list.

The NPU later advised the *amulununo* to appeal against the Executive's decision at the general meeting of the NPU. The women refused because they suspected that the Executive would influence the general meeting. They became more extreme in their views when they heard the allegation that some of the NPU Executive members were blocking the moves made by the relations of Mmankwo to pay her fine of £5 5s. They met and raised the fine to £10 10s.

The *amulununo* decided to take the matter to the state council, the *Nzemabua*. This was a clever move for two reasons. Firstly, the *Nzemabua* is the only constitutional body that can decide whether an act is taboo and an abomination, and secondly, if the *Nzemabua* upholds the *amulununo*'s view, the *Nzemabua* and the NPU Executive have to reach a compromise. The President

General of the NPU strongly objected to the reviewing of the *amulununo*'s case by the *Nzemabua*. The *Nzemabua* ignored the objection and reviewed the case.

The *Nzemabua* upheld the fine imposed on Mmankwo by the *amulununo* and stated categorically that pushing down a wall is taboo, and breaking it is abomination, and accused the Executive of interfering in matters outside their competence. They pointed out that the NPU Executives were influenced by Christians and they asked 'Does Christian religion encourage the pushing down of people's walls?'

It was clear that the *amulununo* group had won the support of the *Nzemabua*. The NPU Executive met and revoked the decision of the *Nzemabua*. The *Nzemabua* met again and described the act of the NPU as null and void because they had no right to contradict the decision of Eze Nri's court in matters that involve Nri tradition. The *amulununo* in turn boycotted the public show arranged by the NPU, which was a blow to the Executive. The next day some women of Akun age-grade paid their fine of £1 1s to the *amulununo* because they were about to complete the mortuary rites of their husbands and could not do that without the *amulununo* – this payment was contrary to the NPU decision.

This dramatic change of public opinion supporting the *amulununo* seemed to silence the NPU and for five months no NPU meeting was held. The Christian members of the NPU, especially the Catholics and the Church Missionary Society, decided to do something to reduce the influence of the *amulununo* group by persuading the Christian women of the *amulununo* not to accept the taboo and abomination rules on the grounds that they were pagan beliefs.

The Joint Christian Committee that was formed enumerated all their grievances against traditional religion and published a pamphlet captioned: 'The case of Nri Christians against the non-Christians.' It became clear that the Christians had been operating within the NPU. Now they came out into the open. The pamphlet condemned the imposition of a 'pagan' system of burial on Christians and said on page 5 '...Christians ceased to recognize any society like *amulununo* society. The Christian members of this Society will have nothing again in common with the non-Christian members. If the Society is such an important one

that must be formed it must be among the Christians only. You are free to form *Amulununo* Christian Society.' And on page 6 it said: '...the Christians cease to recognize any age-grade society in Nri. If there is any need for any financial contribution in Nri for the general development of the town the NPU or the Council has only to contact the different Christian denominations in the town...' It ended thus: '...We are only one with you in matters regarding the general development of the town. Minus this, we shall continue to remain apart till you might have decided to change your mind and allow us like any other Nigerian our worship.'

The *Nzemabua* summoned all those connected with the pamphlet and told them that they would be responsible for whatever happened in Nri. They were ordered to collect all the pamphlets from everybody that had one, and this seemed to reduce the tension although the conflict continued. In August 1973 one of the Christian leaders in a personal letter said, 'I will be glad to let you know that we have all settled down to sort out the little misunderstanding that had existed... We are settling the small matters one by one and are planning about the launching of our four-year development plan.'

This is a typical example of the political influence women have in Nri. It is also typical of how groups formulate and articulate their interests and demands and transmit them to other groups, how groups make rules according to their competence and apply them within their groups, and how other groups challenge the competence and authority of some groups.

### Political Action in Nri as a System of Making Binding Decisions

Three types of binding decisions may be distinguished:

#### (i) *Decisions made by the Lineages*

One typical example will help to illustrate this process. X and Y of Umu Aya Ogwu had a land dispute. Umu Aya Ogwu is a minimal lineage. X reported Y to the *isi nze* who called a meeting of the minimal lineage in his temple. X stated his case; Y and others asked questions. Then Y stated his case and X and others asked questions. X and Y and their witnesses were asked to leave. The *isi nze* and other selected elders discussed the matter in the light of the lineage's traditions

and that of Nri as a whole. They called both parties back and gave their decision. But X protested and said that he was going to take the matter to court. The *isi nze* went and tied a piece of rope round the disputed land. It was taboo for anyone to use it until a settlement was reached.

Then, on advice, X appealed to the *isi nze* of Umu Aguonya major lineage. The *isi nze* called the *ozo* men and *okolobia* of the three minimal lineages that constitute the major lineage and the matter was discussed in the following manner: X and Y stated their cases and witnesses were questioned. The *isi nze* of the minimal lineage stated the decision reached by the minimal lineage. The major lineage upheld the decision of the minimal lineage. X again refused to abide by this ruling and appealed to the maximal lineage.

The *isi nze* of the maximal lineage called all the four component major lineages and the two minimal together. Here again X and Y stated their cases respectively. The minimal and major lineages stated their decisions. Again the decisions of the minimal and major lineages were upheld. X decided to drop the matter. He could, if he had wished, appeal to the state council or the NPU or to the Community Council or go to the Magistrate Court. Whatever he did the lineages would always stand as a witness for Y.

In Nri the lineage elders have powers to make laws, reach decisions and carry them out as long as these are within the limits of their accepted authority. A higher ranking segment can frustrate or nullify the laws and decisions made by a lower ranking lineage. But the lower lineage can challenge the rights of a higher lineage in the court of the next higher lineage. Thus if a minimal lineage feels that a major has overstepped its boundary, the minimal may take up the matter with the maximal. Similarly, a minimal segment may take a matter in which a maximal grouping is involved to the *Nzemabua* court. This was the process in the past. It is still adhered to, at present, in all non-criminal matters. But some may decide to take their civil matters directly to the Nigerian Government courts. If they do they are bound to lose their case because no one in the lineage will be ready to act as witnesses. This is the sanction the lineages have against those who go straight to the court with civil matters without exploring every possibility of settling the matter in Nri by using traditional channels.



The leadership of the lineages at various levels is in the hands of the *ozo* men and *ikenyé okolobia*, and the *umu okolobia* execute the decisions that involve manual activities. Members congregate in the collective temple of the founder of the lineage to hear and decide disputes or discuss matters of the lineage. Slander, fighting, stealing and land disputes between members are handled. Appeals can be made by individuals through the various levels of lineage grouping to the maximal before the matter can be taken to the state court at the Eze's palace. If two lineages are quarrelling, settlement is generally achieved not by related minimal lineages combining against another related minimal lineage, but by the leaders submitting their case to another higher segment in which both are members, or to the Eze's court, or, in recent times, to the NPU or Community Council or the Government courts outside Nri.

(ii) *Decisions made by other groups*

The other groups discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, which are neither lineages nor state councils, can make decisions and execute them as long as these decisions are those within their competence. Examples with the age-grade and the *illimmadu-nato* women's group will demonstrate these processes.

Each age-grade has the right to make rules binding on their members. They have patrons and leaders who help them to organize themselves. A few examples may help to illustrate the nature of decisions some of these groups can make and execute.

The Iruenyi age-grade, those born between 1909 and 1911, are still extremely traditional in their outlook. They are suspicious about the new idea of allowing women to be members of their age-grade, while age-grades like Ifediora (1915–17) and Akpali (1927–29) are tolerant in allowing women of their age to join them. The decision to allow women to join an age-grade is a break from tradition, but each age-grade is allowed to decide and implement it without interference.

In the report on 'Ifediora Mma Age-Grade' the following decisions were reached on 31st December 1966:

- (a) 'Burial and condolences are to be done by both men and women together.
- (b) 'Expenses are to be shared equally between men and women.'

Between 1965 and 1971 the age-grade contributed up to £824 11s towards various projects in Nri. Such contributions involved many meetings in which decisions were taken and implemented.

Similarly the Akpali age-grade has written out its rules and regulations. Grades of disciplinary measures are listed and provisions are made for officers: 'Patron, Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Financial Secretary, Treasurer, Auditor, Provost and Circulator.' The life Patron is defined as the first to take the *ozo* title in the group and he has what they call 'an original vote and in the case of a tie a casting vote.' Indeed all the age-grades have a similar system of organization, although some are becoming more sophisticated than the others. Whatever rules and decisions these groups make, they are subject to ratification by the NPU or the State Councils if it touches on tradition.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, the *illimmadunato* women's association which operates at the state level has a specific function and the legitimacy of its authority is defined and limited by the field of its competence. Thus, they deal with all minor affairs that affect women, and organize women to perform public work such as fetching water, paying contributions, and clearing and sweeping the market places. Since farm work in Nri is done mainly by women, this group deals with the rules concerning the control and confinement of livestock during the farming periods. Members of this group can be changed, but all changes of appointments must be approved by the *Nzemabua* state council.

(iii) *Decisions made by the State Councils*

I have discussed the structure of the *Nzemabua* council and the *Ndi Nze* council, and shown the importance of the *ozo* title in Nri. These two councils are closely associated with Eze Nri's court. They link the court with the various lineages since members are the leaders of the various lineages.

Nri people say 'Eze Nri has *ozo*' and by this they are referring to four basic facts, that the authority of *ozo* is derived from Eze Nri, that he controls all the taboos and abominations associated with the title, that he has vested the rights of taking the title in lineages and can suspend them, and that all *ozo* men are acting on behalf of the Eze Nri.

The *Ndi Nze* council are specialized officials whose main duty is to deal with all matters related

to the *ozo* title in Nri and, in the past, outside Nri. They deal with disputes between *ozo* men and also with property disputes when they are invited to do so by a claimant, who ties a rope around the property and reports the matter to an *ozo* man. The *ozo* man will summon the court of *Ndi Nze* in Eze Nri's palace to hear and pronounce a decision which is regarded as binding. It is also their special function to call down the vengeance of the mystical forces of Nri and the ancestors of Nri on all undetected criminals and on all foreign murderers of Nri men. There are certain categories of offences, such as stealing, which when committed by an *ozo* man will entitle the Eze Nri and his council to strip the man of his title.

On the other hand, the *Nzemabua* council is the most powerful traditional group in Nri, because the council is the traditional bedrock of the Nri state system. It works on behalf of Eze Nri for the whole of Nri. The council deals with all matters affecting the internal and external affairs of the state. They are specifically concerned with matters such as the breaking, defining and abrogating of taboos and abominations in Nri and outside Nri. In the past they dealt with murder, kidnapping and treatment of slaves – to this day they still deal with intra-lineage and inter-lineage disputes, some categories of land disputes that involve oath taking, yam thefts and some types of sexual offences associated with abominations. They also consult the diviners on behalf of the state, administer oaths of *Alusi*, send and receive emissaries, transact all external affairs of Nri, raise public funds and acquire property for public use. At present the NPU has taken over some of the secular functions of this council, especially those dealing with the modernization of Nri. As in the past, the Eze Nri has the power of veto. He can convene and dismiss meetings. But he must not meddle directly with the processes of decision making, though he could stop an *ozo* man from coming to his palace.

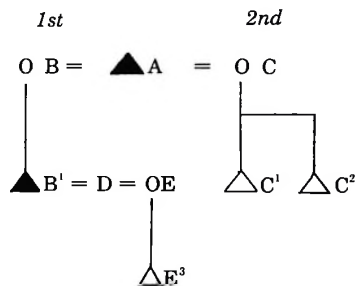
The *Nzemabua* may meet as a legislative body to make laws, meet as an administrative body to administer justice or as a body to probe into other matters. All decisions reached by *Nzemabua* are executed by the 'Executive' age-grade and the *Ndi Nze*. Thus, when a decision on a matter is reached the *isi nze* of the *Nzemabua* announces the decision and the *isi nze* of each lineage will communicate this to his lineage, whilst the 'Exec-

utive' age-grade sees that the decision is translated into action.

At times when it is difficult to reach a decision, the Eze Nri may call a general meeting of all *Ndi Nze* and *okolobia*. The *Ndi Nze* will put their views and the *okolobia* will put theirs. Each would be asked to make a separate decision. When the decisions obtained are different, the Eze generally accepts that of the *okolobia*. The two state councils are aware of this mechanism and try as much as they can to avoid a situation that will give rise to it.

An example of how the *Nzemabua* works will help to illustrate.

In December 1966 a case was brought before the *Nzemabua*. A had two wives. The first wife B had a son B<sup>1</sup> who was the first son, *okpala*. The second wife C had younger male children, C<sup>1</sup> and C<sup>2</sup>:



Later A died and B<sup>1</sup> performed the mortuary rites and ceremony. Later, B<sup>1</sup> got married but the wife D ran away after a while without a child. Unfortunately B<sup>1</sup> died. B was worried and went and collected the bride gifts transferred on behalf of D from D's parents and used them to marry a wife E on behalf of her dead son. The wife E bore a male son E<sup>3</sup>. B insisted that E<sup>3</sup> should inherit the rights of *okpala* and the temple, since B<sup>1</sup> was the social father and more so since the money used to marry the runaway wife was recovered and used to marry E in ghost marriage. C's case was that since B<sup>1</sup> died childless he had lost the right of *okpala*. C<sup>1</sup> must be the *okpala* since C<sup>1</sup> was in direct line.

On the first day they could not reach a decision and two opinions emerged. The first group strongly upheld the principle of primogeniture and the legality of social fatherhood. They maintained

that  $E^3$  should inherit the temple. They argued that since  $B^1$  had performed the mortuary rites of his father  $A$ , and since he had a fruitless marriage with  $D$  and the same money was used for negotiating another fruitful ghost marriage,  $E^3$  was the legal first son and should inherit all the rights and duties of  $B^1$ .  $B^1$  was *okpala* since he died after his father's death and any son born in his name would inherit the *okpala* through him.

The second opinion strongly maintained that those who held the first view erred in judgement, because they were applying the *mkpuke* principle of inheritance to a case that involved the application of the temple, *obu*, principle. They said that according to the *obu* principle only direct sons could inherit the temple. Indirect sons can inherit only in the absence of direct sons. But according to the *mkpuke* principle a woman without a male issue could marry a woman (woman to woman marriage) and if she bore male issue he would inherit her section of the compound.

There was a hot argument about this. The Eze Nri was reclining on his mud built couch watching them. Suddenly he got up and sounded his gong. The argument stopped and all around clapped. He cried 'Ora!' and walked out of the hall into his inner chamber. The *Nzemabua* knew that Eze had dismissed them and they all gradually dispersed. A week later they came back and upheld the decision that  $E^3$  should inherit.

One of the *Nzemabua* said to me that  $B$  had influenced the *Nzemabua's* decision. Another said to me that nobody was influenced, that there are cases of social fatherhood in Nri and it is against tradition to argue that  $E^3$  should not inherit after  $B^1$  had performed the mortuary rites. If  $B^1$  had not done so, or if he had died before the father, he said the matter would have been different. I later found out that the Eze had talked over the matter with his senior *Nzemabua* and arrived at this decision behind the scene.

The remarkable feature of the Nri system is how the Eze Nri is insulated from this type of political struggle and criticism. Nri people believe that he does not err. It is the *Nzemabua* who take all the blame and public criticism.

The structure of the *Nzemabua* reflects the dual and tripartite division of Nri. Nri politicians always see Nri politics, above the ward level, as an attempt to maintain a balance of interests and demands between the two divisions. The dual

division, however, is more obvious than the tripartite. Thus the two divisions are equally represented in the *nzemabua* council and each jealously guards its rights and duties. At the council meetings the two sections in one situation could act together as government and in another situation could viciously oppose one another. Decisions concerning the whole of Nri must be reached by a council in which both sections are equally represented. This constant struggle tends to delay action and reduce decisions to a series of compromises.

### The Role of the Supernatural in Decision Taking and in Contractual Relationships

A study of Nri politics and government would be incomplete without an analysis of the role of the supernatural in decision taking, and in contractual relationships between individuals or groups. I will mention the salient points.

Some major decisions taken either at the state level or at the lineage level, at a certain stage, may be directed and determined by the diviners consulted by the leaders. Generally, three different diviners are consulted on the same issue to find out what line of action to take. Two or three lines of action are put before the diviners, and the one that has the greatest amount of support is accepted and implemented.

At times when no decision at all could be reached the diviners are expected to suggest a decision. The decision that has the greatest amount of support among the diviners is implemented. If  $A$  and  $B$  individuals or groups are quarrelling over a question such as the ownership of a piece of land, and it is difficult to arrive at the truth by human evidence, one party may be asked to swear on oath that he owns the piece of land. Similarly, two parties may seal a contract by both swearing an oath. The oath is expected to kill the individual or individuals who swear falsely or break the contract within a period of time, generally within one year.

In Nri, the type of oath used for swearing or making a contract generally reflects the degree of kinship relationship of the individuals or groups involved. This can best be seen in Table 46.

Except in a few cases, all oaths can be ritually dissolved and repudiated if both parties agree. As shown in the above table, all oaths except the *Ibene* kills not only the person who swore falsely or

Table 46 Kinship Relationship and Types of Oath

Kinship relationship of both parties swearing or contracting	Type of oath	Extent of those killed by <i>Alusi</i>
Same minimal lineage	<i>Ibene</i>	Kills the person only
Same maximal or major lineage	Minor <i>Alusi</i>	Kills the person and the immediate relations
Different maximal or major lineage	Major <i>Alusi</i>	Kills the person and the immediate and distant relations
Different villages (wards) or town	<i>Igba Ndu</i> ( <i>Alusi Ana</i> )	Kills anyone involved and other members of the person's lineage (unspecified)

broke the contract but also his collateral and lineal relations. Oath taking is therefore a matter of great concern which generates a great deal of political action within and between groups.

The *Igba Ndu* oath was generally employed to establish agreeable and lasting relationships between the leaders of Nri town and the leaders of other Igbo towns. It was one of the mechanisms of consolidating an alliance and was therefore an important ritual instrument employed by Nri in the management of their external affairs – it is the subject of the next chapter.

#### CHAPTER EIGHT: NOTES

1. In this respect I am following M.G. Smith. (See References).
2. In this respect I am following David Easton. (See References).
3. In this respect I am applying some of the views expressed by G. Almond. (See References).
4. Cases in which I mentioned the names of those involved are public issues in Nri and it would be justifiable to mention names. But in purely private matters I hesitate to mention the names and would rather call them X or Y.
5. Summons warrant collected from Dan Okolo, grandson of Eze Nri Obalike of Uruoji, of which I have a copy.
6. R. ONUORAH, *Report on Ifediora Mma Age-Grade, Nri, 1949–1971*.



## Chapter 9

# The External Affairs and Politics of Nri

### The Sources of Reconstruction

The external political system of Nri is now a thing of the past, for it was banned from operation in 1911 by the British administrators of Eastern Nigeria. My reconstruction is made by conclusions reached on the basis of the following sources:<sup>1</sup>

- (i) Personal observations of the present attitude of most Igbo peoples towards Nri people and Nri town.<sup>2</sup>
- (ii) Information obtained from Nri elders.<sup>3</sup>
- (iii) Information obtained from elders of Nri lineages in other Igbo towns.<sup>4</sup>
- (iv) Information obtained from elders of other non-Nri settlements that were formerly under Eze Nri's influence.<sup>5</sup>
- (v) Intelligence reports written between 1910 and 1934 by various British administrators.
- (vi) Records on Nri people by early writers, such as Equiano (1789), John Adam (1823) and Baikie (1856).
- (vii) Records of early scholars, such as Major Leonard (1895–1906), Northcote Thomas, a government anthropologist (1910–1914), Talbot (1921), Meek (1931) and Jeffreys (1934).
- (viii) Records of early missionaries, such as The Rev. Father Duhaze (1906), Bishop Shanahan (1906–20) and Basden (1910–1920).
- (ix) Genealogical and ethnographical data about the distribution of Nri lineages and Nri culture in Igbo land.
- (x) Evidence based on the distribution and interpretation of the material cultures of Igbo-Ukwu and Ezira archaeological finds

and the ethnographic material in Odinani Museum, Nri.

- (xi) Events recorded in the Bight of Benin and Biafra between 1500 and 1900.
- (xii) Linguistic evidence.

The quality of some of these sources has been discussed in the introduction. But one fact is difficult to dispute: when the data is assembled and discussed in the context of Nri social structure and beliefs as on-going processes, the final picture that emerges tells a fairly reliable story. Of course reliability lessens as one moves from the most recent to the most distant past.

### The Major Problems of Reconstruction

There are several ways of reconstructing a past culture whose major systems are still evolving and have abundant ethnographic and archaeological material. The method I have adopted is as follows:

- (i) Making an intensive and extensive study of the existing culture of the area.
- (ii) Studying the systems in terms of the most recent past and noting the links between the present and the most recent past.
- (iii) Reconstructing the distant past with the fragmentary historical evidence obtained and seeking for the links between the distant past and the more recent past and the present.
- (iv) Seeing the whole system either as a continuous process from the past to the present, or as a discontinuous process, depending on the nature of the evidence available.
- (v) Leaving the interpretation open to further investigation and reinterpretation in the light of evidence yet unknown.

The problem to be seriously considered in reconstructing the Nri external political system between the eighteenth century and 1911 is the problem of change, especially in the symbolic field, since the system is sustained and institutionalized by the ritual manipulation of symbols.

A field study of the major culture complexes and traits found in the Igbo-Ukwu finds was made between 1966 and 1967. I selected three elders between the ages of 60 and 75 from six Igbo towns to look at ten selected photographs of the Igbo-Ukwu objects to identify them and state their use. The elders had never seen these pictures before and I gave them no indication as to the nature of the pictures other than that the objects were traditional things.<sup>5</sup> The result obtained has been quantified as shown in Table 47, from which it is clear that the Nri and Oreri elders had the highest scores.

In Chapter 3 on religion and in Chapter 5 on leadership, I said that amongst the Nri people the *ichi* title is associated with the parallel marks cut on the face with iron blades and with the ritual egg competition that follows, and that the *ozo* title is associated with the use of different types of staffs, the tying of cords on both ankles, elephant tusks and bronze bells. The Nri title is associated with a sacred king who wears a copper or bronze anklet on both feet and beads on his wrists. He is believed to have mystical control over flies, bees, yam beetles and locusts, and his greatness is associated with animals such as the leopard and elephant. Each category of people in Nri keeps a specific taboo proper to their rank, as well as observing a common taboo against eating snails, some monkeys and the killing of python snakes. To break a taboo is an abomination that is purified by using the ram or the head of a ram and eggs. I also said that only *ozo* and Nri titled men are buried in wooden boxes and that the Eze Nri was always buried seated; that decorative pottery and wooden bowls of various sizes and shapes are used for the rituals associated with the *Alusi* and *Mmuo*. Also, horses are connected with the achievement of prestige and are traded from the north through Nsukka.

In the Igbo-Ukwu finds bronze objects were detected marked with *ichi*, various objects described as staff heads, human figurines with anklets and *ichi* marks, elephant tusks, bronze objects that depict flies, beetles, grasshoppers? (locust?)

Table 47 Table of Identification of Igbo-Ukwu Finds by Elders

Subjects	Identification (per cent)	Use (per cent)	Remarks
Nri elders	90%	80%	Identified all the objects and associated them with the Nri title
Oreri elders	65%	78%	Identified most of the objects and associated them with the Nri title
Awka elders	80%	25%	Identified some and associated them with the <i>ozo</i> title
Igbo-Ukwu	51%	30%	Identified the bronze bell and animal heads and <i>ichi</i> marked faces
Okwulobia	9%	9%	Identified the bronze bell only
Aguleri	25%	—	Identified the bells, and pottery, and associated them with the <i>ozo</i> title

eggs, heads of animals such as leopards, elephants, rams, monkeys and snails and python snakes. There were thousands of pottery fragments, some whole pieces, and a burial chamber in which the occupant was buried in a sitting position in the midst of rich grave goods that included beads. (see table 9).

A comparative study of the culture traits that occur in Igbo-Ukwu with those that occur in the extant cultures of Nri shows that they can be classified under five broad headings, namely those associated with the Nri title, the *ozo* title, the *ichi* title, the rituals of *Alusi* and *Mmuo*, and status and prestige.

The links between the Igbo-Ukwu objects and present-day belief systems are illustrated in Table 48. How does one account for these links? Are they accidental? In answering these questions one must bear in mind that the extant culture is still flourishing on the very spot and in the area where the archaeological finds were buried.

I shall take the present *ichi* marks on the faces of living Nri men as just one of such cultural links between the present and the past. The *ichi* marks

Table 48 Links between Igbo-Ukwu and Present Nri Culture

Culture Traits in Igbo-Ukwu	Connection with Extant Cultures				Prestige
	Nri Title	Ozo Title	Ichl Title	Other Rituals	
Sitting burial	x	-	-	-	-
Coiled python	-	-	-	x	-
Coiled snake with egg in mouth	-	-	-	x	-
Snail shells	-	-	-	x	-
Ichl marks on faces	-	-	x	x	x
Ichl marks on things	x	x	x	x	x
Marks around navel	-	-	-	-	x
Rope anklets on legs	-	x	-	-	-
Bronze anklets	x	-	-	-	-
Wristlets	-	-	-	-	x
Grasshoppers (locusts)	x	-	-	-	-
Beetles (yam beetles)	x	-	-	-	-
Flies	x	-	-	-	-
Birds (some species)	x	-	-	-	-
Tortoise	-	-	-	x	-
Roped pot	x	x	-	x	x
Pottery types (others)	x	x	-	x	x
Bronze bowls	x	-	-	x	-
Fans	x	x	-	-	x
Elephant tusk	x	x	-	x	x
Iron blades	-	x	x	x	-
Bronze head of leopard	x	-	-	x	-
Bronze head of elephant	x	-	-	x	-
Bronze eggs	-	-	x	x	-
Bronze heads of rams	-	-	-	x	-
Bronze heads of horses	-	-	-	x	x
Staff heads	x	x	-	x	x
Coiled iron	-	-	-	x	x
Beads	x	x	-	x	x
Double headed human figure	-	-	-	x	-
Bronze bells	x	x	-	x	-
Man on horseback	-	-	-	-	x
Burial chamber	x	x	-	-	-
Raised platform	x	x	-	x	-
Fish	-	-	-	x	-
Monkeys	-	-	-	x	-

are crucial in the Nri title system, because without taking the *ichi* one cannot take the *ozo* title, and without taking the *ozo* title one cannot take the Nri title. Furthermore, *ichi* is a mark of royalty made on the faces of human beings as well as on objects such as walls, wood and metal. I discussed in Chapter 5 the significance of *ichi* marks in Nri and Igbo society in the past.

The objects excavated by Shaw at Igbo-Ukwu dated A.D. 850 (Carbon 14) have *ichi* marks. The objects excavated by Hartle at Ezira dated 1495 (Carbon 14) have *ichi* marks. Equiano, who was born in Igbo land around 1745, associated *ichi* marks with persons holding political office.<sup>7</sup> John Adam associated *ichi* marks with persons of some high political status in Igbo land.<sup>8</sup> Baikie associated *ichi* marks with persons of high respect in Igbo land.<sup>9</sup> The picture that emerges is that morphologically the *ichi* marks have not undergone any radical change for about one thousand years.

Nri oral traditions and those of other Igbo towns east of the Niger exhibit a conspicuous absence of events or episodes about radical change. On the whole, the Igbo culture area was comparatively undisturbed until the later part of the eighteenth century. Even then the disturbances were not of the type in which a new influx of immigrants brings radical ideas to alter the existing ideas and social structure. On the contrary, there is evidence to support the view that new ideas that were introduced were accommodated into the existing structure without much change.<sup>10</sup> Nri is therefore probably a society whose culture has undergone minimal changes perhaps during the past one thousand years. The structure, depth and span of Nri genealogies support this view, which I have also tried to establish by using combined archaeological, written and ethnographical evidence (see Chapter 2). It is also important to point out that, between the eighteenth century and the present day, conditions were far more disturbed; this was the era when slavery expanded, militant states emerged, colonialism prospered and independence occurred. During this disturbed period of approximately three hundred years, the structure and content of the ideas expressed by *ichi* marks remained relatively constant.

One can show, from the indirect evidence available, that probably no major changes took place before Equiano's time – that is, before the

mid-eighteenth century. The oral tradition and history of Nri show that Nri has been ruled by fifteen Eze Nri. My evidence based on Nri genealogy shows that between about 1745 and the present day Nri has had four Eze Nri, the twelfth to fifteenth in succession. The first eleven ruled before Equiano's time (see Table 1). According to the history, the hey-day of the kingdom was between the third and eleventh rulers. It is most likely that the structure and content associated with *ichi* marks developed during the hey-day of the Nri kingdom. Probably Equiano was describing a continuing but gradually declining process.

The following case from outside Nri illustrates how idea complexes central to a system do not change so easily. The Eucharist is central in the Roman Catholic doctrine. It is the doctrine of the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ in the appearance of bread and wine. The Eucharist is symbolized in form as a fish and some round loaves of bread, or as a round white host suspended on the top of a chalice. This form and idea relationship in the Eucharist has remained constant from the Middle Ages to this day. Catholic records show that the form and idea relationships of some of their central doctrines have always remained constant in spite of the great upheavals in the Catholic Church. The barbarian invasions, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the age of exploration, the age of colonization and the age of industrialization span over 1,500 years, yet the symbolic meaning of the Eucharist has remained relatively constant. This is not because Europe had writing – many symbolic forms have been recorded but have changed – but because the symbols central to the existence of a system must remain constant to sustain the system. This argument makes allowances for the fact that ideas can alter or be eliminated by new doctrines using old symbols.

The evidence supports the view that the form and idea relationships of central symbols in Nri political and ritual organization institutionalized in the *Ichí*, *Ozo* and *Nri* titles, have remained sufficiently constant to warrant a valid reconstruction of the system at least up to the nineteenth century. This reconstruction is supported by fragmentary evidence contained in Nri oral tradition and in the known dispersal of Nri lineages in Igbo land, deductions from archaeological evidence and some early documents. The piecing together

of all this evidence may be done in the light of the present and the most recent past cultures of Nri and of the Igbo peoples generally. New evidence may of course necessitate reworking the reconstruction.

### The Ritual Basis and Character of the Hegemony

I outlined the character of Nri religion in Chapter 3. The evidence indicates that the establishment of Nri hegemony and its ascendancy in Igboland in the past was based on the effective manipulation of the religious ideologies, doctrines and symbolisms by Nri men. How was this done? Earlier on, in Chapters 1 and 3, I said that in Nri spears, clubs, bows and arrows, cutlasses and hoes were transformed into ritual objects. Only the gun was not ritualized – possibly it was only introduced later. The taboo and the abominations associated with bloodshed were one of the major factors that inhibited the development of militarism.

The occurrence of Nri lineages in an area of over 4,500 square miles in the northern sector of the Igbo culture area indicates that proliferation of Nri lineages from Nri to these areas did occur in the past. The genealogies of these lineages vary in depth. This appears to support their oral traditions, which suggest that they may have left Nri at different times.

Nri men were invited to these villages. Such an invitation and its acceptance were sealed in a ritual oath between the leaders of the settlement and any Nri man who represented Eze Nri. Settlements under this type of agreement were regarded as those that owed a particular kind of allegiance to Eze Nri. These settlements identified themselves with Nri by observing some of the major taboos and abominations prescribed by Nri. The Nri men consecrated their priests and gave the insignia of office, *ofo*, to their *ozo* men. These settlements, apart from paying Nri officials, sent annual tributes to Eze Nri and the nearby settlements also sent their leaders and representatives to Nri town once a year for the New Year ceremony, *Igu Aro*, in Eze Nri's palace. At the end of the ceremony the Eze Nri gave them the yam medicine and the blessing of fertility and longevity.

Nri men resident in the settlements were the 'Ears' and 'Eyes' of Eze Nri. He manipulated many aspects of the internal and external affairs of these settlements through visiting Nri officials.



They sent information to Eze Nri's palace in a secret 'language' which is still spoken among Nri elders.

Eze Nri had no army to enforce his will. Nevertheless, he could impose his will effectively by threatening to use, or actually using, what were considered mystical forces. Eze Nri could curse or declare anathema on any settlement that flouted his authority. Nri men would at once spread horrifying and shocking news about the settlement all over Igbo land. In some extreme cases the Nri men in the village would withdraw from the settlement to other neighbouring settlements. The settlement would be in a state of ritual blockade and siege. Markets would close down because neighbouring towns would boycott a market in a town that was under the ritual curse of Eze Nri. In due course the settlement would be forced to come to terms with Eze Nri and negotiations would begin. Conditions for peace would be given and if they were fulfilled the ritual curse would be lifted and the news would spread.

Another important feature of Nri hegemony was the constant struggle between Igbo settlements for the economic control of markets and ritual control of cults and land disputes. Every autonomous settlement in Igbo land had four market days. Groups of settlements in an area of about fifty square miles or more attended the markets of one another. I pointed out in Chapter 4 that one major power of Eze Nri was his ability to help build up a market or to cause its dissolution, because he controls the market *Alusi*. Several neighbouring towns competing for the control of markets in their area would submit their claims to Eze Nri. When Eze Nri had decided, he announced his decision and Nri men would spread the news. It became an abomination not to attend the market of the town that won the appeal. The others were closed down or remained local markets.

Another important feature of the system was that Eze Nri could step in and stop two towns fighting, and then finally settle the dispute. Northcote Thomas, the government anthropologist, first made this observation in 1910, but said that he saw no dispute referred to Eze Nri. In any case he did not stay long enough to observe any referred, and even if he had stayed it is unlikely that he would have seen anything, for by 1910 the British had established native court areas in Akwa Division and Nri town was grouped into the

Agulu court area.<sup>11</sup> On the same issue, M.D.W. Jeffreys, who wrote more on the rituals of Nri kingship, recorded: 'It was pointed out that he might act as a peace-maker if fighting occurred between two towns. He could send for the elders of the two towns and endeavour to settle the dispute.'<sup>12</sup>

My investigation also showed that in the past Eze Nri settled disputes between towns. According to Odenigbo: 'Nri people could not stop towns from fighting if they wanted to fight. We only made peace when war had begun. Eze Nri would send Nri men accompanied by Eze's dwarf to stop the fighting and to start peace negotiations. During my father's time Eze Nri stopped the fighting between Ichi and Ojoto, Oba and Ojoto, Umuoji and Oba, Abatete and Uke, and Ojoto and Uke.' Some elders in these towns seemed to accept the fact that in the past Eze Nri was the only person who could stop fighting between towns.

During my field work in 1967, Eze Nri sent for the elders of Umuleri and Aguleri, who had been quarrelling and fighting over a piece of land. All social activities between them had stopped before the announcement of the Privy Council's ruling on the matter which was rejected by one of the parties and the fighting continued. Eze Nri sent his agents and the dwarf to make peace and I accompanied them. First, the abomination of killing was purified by the performance of the purification ritual by a Nri man and thus the association between the two towns was re-opened. The land dispute was heard and judgement was about to be given when the Nigerian civil war broke out.

This system of control of settlements did not involve control over day-to-day running of the government of settlements. Each settlement managed its internal affairs according to its customs and traditions. Only matters related to taboos and abominations, the interpretation of customs and traditions, long standing disputes within the towns or between the towns were submitted to Eze Nri, who was regarded as the supreme head.

### **The External Policies and the Economic Basis**

The external policy of Nri was based on a deliberate well-planned and carefully executed method of moving into Igbo settlements, indoctrinating the

political élite of the settlement in the mystical supremacy of Eze Nri and the mystical power of Nri men, and then persuading them to enter into alliance with their Eze Nri in order to obtain the material rewards of his mystical protection. After a long period of control and manipulation, the relationship between Nri and these settlements evolved into various forms.

One type consisted of those towns in which leadership was vested in the *ozo* men. Eze Nri, by controlling the *ozo* men through his agents, had a measure of control over certain of the political, ritual and economic activities of these settlements. Towns very near Nri fell into this category, for example Nimo, Enugu-Ukwu, Enugu-Agidi, Nnawfia, Awka, Adazi, Agulu, Nise, Nibo, Nnanka, Oraukwu, Abacha and Abagana.<sup>13</sup>

The second type consisted of those towns that had kings or chiefs. Eze Nri had control over the conferring of the *ozo* title and the coronation of these kings or chiefs. But the day-to-day government of the town was under the control of the king or chief and his councillors. Some of the earlier Aro settlements and other settlements such as Ufuma, Ajalli, Onitsha, Ogidi, Obosi, Nnewi and Oguta fell into this category.

The third type consisted of towns in which resident Nri lineages dominated the politics of the settlements. In this case the Eze Nri had a measure of control through the leaders of the resident Nri lineages. Towns like Abatete and those towns in the Nsukka area, such as Ehalumona, came into this category.

Among the fourth type were towns that had established a political system of Nri type with or without an Eze and become completely autonomous after some time. Some, however, still accepted Eze Nri as the fount of authority. Such west Igbo towns as Ogboli, Igbozo (both are now called Ihusa), Ogboli Issele-ukwu, probably Agbor in its early stages, Owa, Uteh, Okpanam, Asaba, Iliah, Aballa and Akuku came under this group.

Nri officials were paid for the ritual or political duties they undertook. For example, Nri men were paid for every *ozo* man they installed outside Nri and a part of the payment was sent to Eze Nri. These ritualist diplomats were also traders. They traded their stocks of ritual and social objects and iron. The peace of Nri enabled inter-settlement trade to flourish.

Old iron cutlasses and hoes were used by Nri

people in performing the rites of cleansing abominations and purifying settlements. The client had to provide these items and alter the rites the Nri agent took them away. Iron was essential for the making of agricultural tools and ritual spears for the *ozo* titles. In this respect Nri people controlled an important source of iron in the area under their control.

The traditional Igbo economy was mainly based on yam cultivation and palm-oil production. Yams required not only fertile land but also skill and patience in nursing the vines to produce a plentiful yield. Communities that depended solely upon yams, not only for sustenance but also as a source of wealth, had to rely partly on their accumulated skill and knowledge and partly on the mystical forces that supplemented those aspects of knowledge that were beyond their control. The doctrine which Nri men spread all over Igbo land with regard to the yam cult was convincing. The yam cult, called *ifejioku*, was controlled by Eze Nri whose power was also substantiated by the existence of a powerful oracle called *Agbala Nze Nri* in Nri town. This oracle is said to be the oldest in Igbo land. Igbo men from various settlements consulted this oracle and got results that puzzled them. Because it was so accurate, the oracle reinforced Nri claims to control mystical forces. Markets and the market rituals were also firmly under Nri control.

The belief that Nri was a great ritual centre, the path through which the spirits of the dead went to spirit land, and that its king was mystically great and powerful, was central to the establishment of Nri hegemony.

### The Character of the Nri External Control System

The administrative and entrepreneurial activities of Nri involved a high degree of control being established over the patterns of ritual, economic and ideological organization of other Igbo settlements. To this end, a system of control was developed that mirrored the non-military character of Nri.

Briefly, the characteristics of this system may be summed up as follows. (a) There was an elaborate and hierarchically arranged system of titles open to any successful individual. Through this process the individual was gradually socialized into Nri rituals and administrative techniques. (b)

To control the system a hierarchy of political official elite was developed: Eze Nri, *Nzemabua*, *Ndi Nze* and *ichi* title men. The chief external officials were the *ichi*-titled men. (c) The system was based on the proliferation of Nri lineages as a method of occupying Igbo settlements before indoctrination and domination. The settlements were indoctrinated in the ritual and political ideology that Eze Nri was sacred and had mystical powers that could be beneficial materially. Nri itinerant agents, ritualists and traders went to the older Igbo settlements and persuaded their political elites to enrol and remain loyal to Eze Nri. Loyalty was achieved by controlling the *ozo* title, and not disregarding taboos and the Nri code of conduct. (d) A secret language was developed and used only by Nri men so that information could pass between the political elite in Nri palace and the Nri men outside. (e) A complex code of rules and regulations was set up to guide the conduct of Nri men officiating outside Nri.

Technically this process of building and sustaining a political hegemony was limited by a number of factors, such as the absence of an adequate supply of Nri manpower to cover the settlements within the hegemony, the problems of an interregnum and the state of the internal politics of Nri; the spatial distribution of the settlements; the ecological limitations of communication, which consisted of trekking through bush paths; the inability to maintain the belief system that sustained the ties between Nri and the settlements, and also the inability to cope with new ideas, new opportunities and aggression by armed forces.

### The Nri and Orieri Relationship

Nri tradition holds that the Orieri people left Diodo during a crisis in the reign of Nri Namoke. This seems to corroborate a similar version current in Orieri.<sup>14</sup>

My study of the Orieri social structure and political system shows that they have three maximal lineages: Umu Nri Agu, Umu Nnakwa and Umu Nri Ezula. The founders of these three maximal lineages were regarded as the sons of Avo, who was himself regarded as the brother of the founder of Nri. Avo fled from Nri after a disagreement and founded Orieri, which is only about ten miles south-west of Nri and is now bounded by Adazi town on the north, Igbo-Ukwu

on the south, Agulu-Uzo-Igbo on the east and Ichida on the west. It seems likely that a second wave of Nri emigrants led by Nri Agu, who abandoned the Nri throne in the sixteenth century, also settled in Orieri, Oraukwu and across the Niger to found some of the Nri lineages in the West Igbo area at Ogboli-Ibusa, Ogwashi-ukwu and Ogboli-Issele-ukwu.<sup>15</sup>

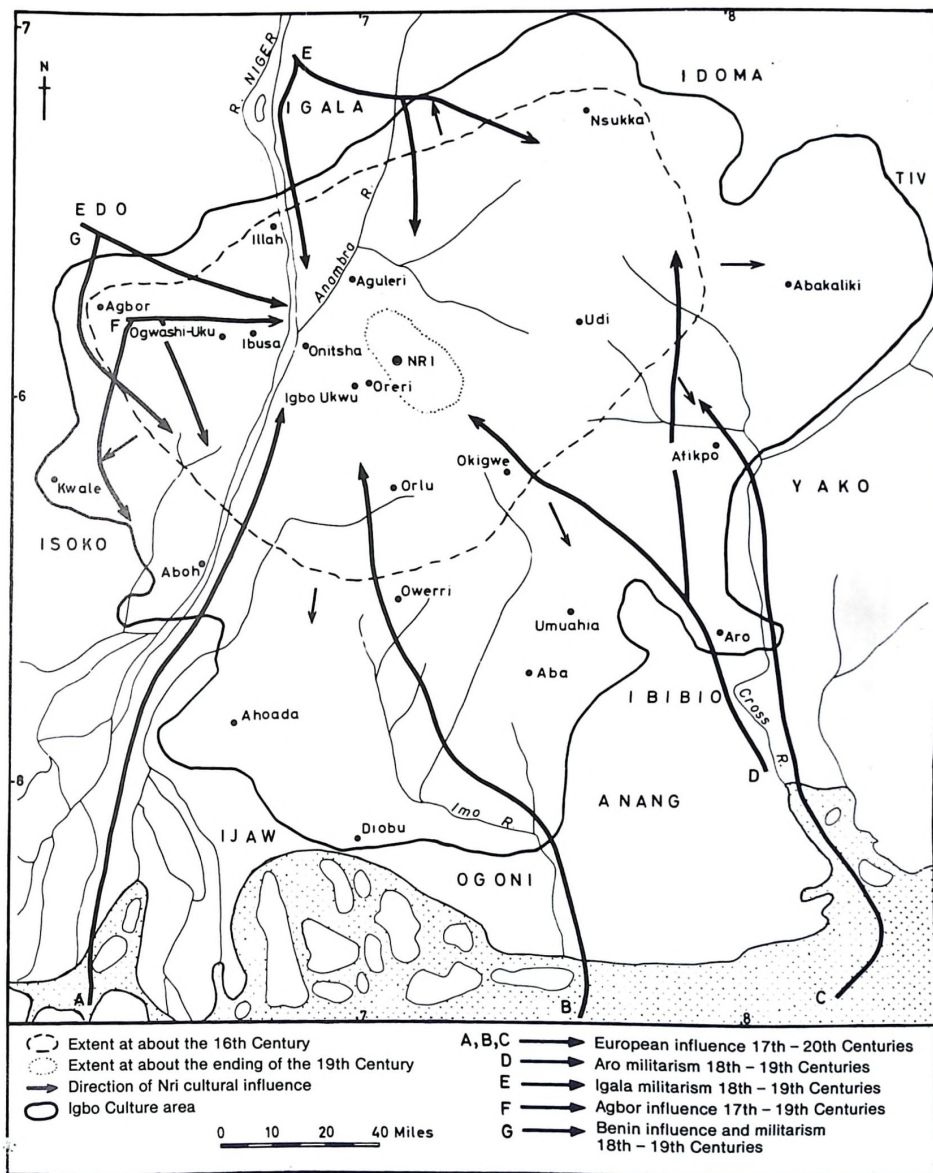
The political system developed in Orieri was similar in many respects to that in Nri. It was based on a sacred kinship called Nri which, through manipulation of the *ozo* title and religious symbols, achieves political dominance over a people whose basic social structure consisted of segmentary patrilineages. A comparative study of the political system of Orieri and Nri will not be attempted here, but it is important to note that in Orieri the *okpala* title is highly elaborated, whilst in Nri it is not a title but a social status defined by birth. The Nri kingship has a deep and long connection with Aguleri, while that of Orieri has not, and this may be attributed to the fact that it is a state that developed out of Nri.

Map 4 shows the extent of Nri and Orieri hegemony at their apogee. It is clear that the Nri sphere encompassed that of Orieri but each tried to avoid encroaching. By the middle of the nineteenth century the Orieri sphere of influence had almost ceased to exist and the relationship between Orieri and some towns within its sphere had degenerated to that of hostility and mistrust caused by the slave trade. However, those towns under Nri, especially those around Nri, still kept their ties with Nri, as was described by Major Leonard, until a little after the advent of the British.

Igbo-Ukwu and Orieri towns belong to the same cultural milieu, but all the evidence indicates that the objects, although archaeologically named Igbo-Ukwu, were probably associated with Orieri ancestors. The fact that some of the culture traits depicted on the objects are associated with the *ozo* complex and are found in most parts of Igbo land suggests we are dealing with a pan-Igbo culture. Indeed about 90 per cent of the Igbo towns that I visited claimed that Nri people of Agukwu conferred these titles on them – about 10 per cent claimed Orieri, and these towns were around Orieri. Not one town pointed to Igbo-Ukwu. This does not mean that the Igbo-Ukwu people are completely ignorant of the use of these



Map 12 The Collapse of Nri Hegemony





objects, but it means that they are not thought to be responsible for the pan-Igbo development and distribution of the symbols similar to the types depicted on the objects.

### The Extent, Decline and Collapse

According to Nri political history the peak of Nri hegemony was before the reign of Eze Nri Alike and Nri Apia, who probably reigned jointly between 1677 and 1700, using genealogical dating. Its ebb was during the later part of the nineteenth century.

At the beginning the hegemony appears to have included a few settlements around Nri such as Enugu-Ukwu, Nneofia, Enugu-Agidi, Amanuke and Awka. At its zenith it included places such as Owa, Ogboli, Issele-Ukwu, Ogwashi-Ukwu, Ogboli, Igbouzo, Asaba, Abala, Iliah, part of Orlu, Okigwe and Nsukka areas, Udi areas, and settlements around Nri such as Nimo, Adazi, Agulu, Nise, Oraukwu, Nneni, Nnewi and Ifite. Between 1896 and 1911 it included settlements near and around Nri, such as Isuama, Agbaja, Enugu-Agidi, Enugu-Ukwu, Ezi-Owelle, Abacha, Achalla, Abagana, Nimo, Ifite, Abatete, Nibo, Awka, Nise, Agulu, Adazi, Umuoji, and Obosi.<sup>16</sup>

Map 12 illustrates the trend of the collapse. The coming of Europeans to the coast of Biafra during the sixteenth century was followed by the introduction of several new crops such as cassava, which was an effective substitute for yam as a means of subsistence, but was not an effective substitute for the attainment of prestige. Cassava grows in poorer soil and requires less time to grow. The gradual spread of cassava into the area under Nri hegemony and the growth of the slave trade rapidly undermined the dependence of most northern Igbo settlements on the power of Eze Nri over fertility and famine.

This resulted in the liberation of the Igbo traditional economy from its ritualized anchorage based at Nri. Many Igbo settlements joined in the trade and new settlements which never came under Nri were founded. One of these new settlements was Aro-Chukwu. By the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries the Aro were fully involved in the slave trade. They monopolized the trade and established new settlements deep in the heart of Igbo land. They established most of their settlements at the periphery of areas bordering on the Nri sphere of influence and began to

operate in these areas. The Aro also used the paramilitary age-grade organizations of the Abam, Ada and Ohaffia and the cult of the Aro oracle to obtain their merchandise of human beings. Eze Nri Enweleana did all he could to discourage the raiding activities organized by Okolie Ijome of Ndikelionwu, but failed.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Agbor and Benin influences began to be felt on the western flank of the Nri hegemony. The movement of peoples that followed the Adigwe-Ezechima crisis in Agbor and the Benin attack on Ubulu-Ukwu between 1750 and 1755 were eastward, and with them new ideas flowed rapidly into the area under Nri. New settlements like Onitsha and Oguta were founded around this period; they never came under Nri hegemony but were subjected to Nri cultural influence.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Igala began to push north-eastwards into Nsukka area, the northern limit of Nri hegemony. Eha Alumona, Nsukka Asadu and other towns under Nri hegemony fell under the military administration of Igala.

At the beginning of this century, between 1907 and 1910, the Roman Catholic Mission and the Church Missionary Society had begun to establish schools and churches in Igbo land. Nri was one of the first targets, for it was considered by the Catholics as 'the Citadel of Satan'. By 1906 there were 130 children in the Catholic school at Nri and 70 and 80 at Isingwu and Umuoji respectively. Thus Christianity and western education helped to erode the system.<sup>18</sup>

By 1906 the British had taken over the administration of Igbo land and to their way of thinking the Nri system had to be resolved.

## CHAPTER NINE: NOTES

1. Some of these sources were discussed in the Introduction and in Chapter 5.
2. I lived in Nri town for about three years and visited about one hundred other Igbo towns in the Igbo culture area during this period to conduct surveys and cross-check facts. (See Appendix 3).
3. Persons like Anumba, Nwaokoye, Odenigbo, the Eze Nri, Nrijofo II, Akunne, Anumba, Atuanya and Okeke Okonkwo, all participated in the system as adults or as adolescents either at the close of the last century or at the beginning of this century. (See Appendix 4).
4. See Appendices 3 and 4.
5. For (iv) to (xi) see Introduction. (See Appendix 3).
6. This exercise was carried out before the publication of the *Igbo-Ukwu* book. Since its publication in 1970 some of the élite have started to interpret and re-interpret the symbolic meanings of the traits depicted on the objects. A feed-back process seems to have begun in the towns.
7. O. EQUIANO, *op. cit.*
8. J. ADAM, *op. cit.*
9. W.B. BAIKIE, *op. cit.*
10. The movement of peoples from Agbor and Benin that resulted in the establishment of Onitsha, Oguta and Aboh, etc., did not alter the existing social order, although new ideas slipped in.
11. N.W. THOMAS, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-speaking Peoples of Nigeria*, Part I.
12. M.D.W. JEFFREYS, *The Divine Umu Ndri: Kings of Igbo Land*.
13. Some élite members of these towns, because of the present-day struggle for the political autonomy of towns and ignorance of the facts, may swear that their towns were never under Eze Nri. But the elders will readily not only support the view but will give the full story if they are interviewed privately.
14. There is a version that claimed autochthony for Oteri. It could be that certain Igbo people were there before the influx of Nri emigrants. There is no doubt that Nri emigrants moved into Oteri, since there is a chain of Nri lineages all the way from Nri through Adazi, Oraukwu, Nnobi and Oteri. All these lineages claim to have migrated from Nri. This indicates the direction of the flow of people or of ideas.
15. This explains why Umu Nri Agu lineages occur in those towns.
16. A.G. LEONARD, *The Lower Niger and its Peoples*. First edition 1906; new impression 1968. pp. 38-39.
17. A.G. LEONARD, *Ibid.*
18. J.D. JORDAN, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*. 1949. pp. 37, 42 and 67-68.



## **Part Three**

# **‘Tradition’ and ‘Modernity’**



## Chapter 10

# Nri in the Modern Nigerian Polity 1900 – 1972

### The Factors of Change

After the British took over the administration of Southern Nigeria in 1906 and the Nri system was banned in 1911, external political relations rapidly ceased to exist formally though they continued to function covertly. The internal political system also continued, albeit in a modified form. The setting was no longer the Igbo culture area. The new setting was the Nigerian Polity, and its rapidly changing nature.

Modifications in the internal politics of Nri, resulting in the emergence of a new structure, were generated by three inter-dependent factors:

- (i) The political and economic demands of the British colonial government between 1910 and 1960.
- (ii) The religious demands of various Christian missionaries between 1910 and 1971 and, more recently, the demands of the new syncretic religious bodies.
- (iii) The political and economic demands of the various Nigerian governments between 1961 and 1973.

*These factors are not isolated. They are inter-related functionally and the patterns that emerge as a result of these demands are easier to comprehend as a whole.*

The British administration's first problem was finance and the availability of competent personnel for administering populations whose culture was strange and unknown to the rulers.<sup>1</sup> At first, British techniques in this area were simple and straightforward. The administration undertook a quick survey, then lumped together into one administrative unit Igbo settlements claiming common origin or having apparently similar

interests. This was considered wise in the absence of what was regarded as an overall centralized system of government in Igbo land. The British considered the Igbo areas with a centralized system as areas under the influence of Benin or Igala. Hence the Western Igbo areas were all wrongly considered as areas once under Benin domination, and Nsukka and Nri as areas under Igala influence. Of course this particular theory was based on the then fashionable notion that Negroes were incapable of developing complex political systems without contact with Northern Africa.<sup>2</sup>

Another problem that the British administrators had to face was that of political leadership in Igbo areas under Nri. 'Ritualism' as a system of domination sounded strange to people who were familiar with militarism as a system of domination. It is therefore not surprising that the British administrators readily understood the political significance of the Benin state, the Igala state, the Hausa and Yoruba states but failed to understand that of Nri.

Some of the British administrators attempted to obliterate the Nri state system which could have been used as a base for unifying many settlements in Igbo land in 1911. In 1930, twenty years after the Nri system had been banned, the error was noted and an attempt was made to revive it. It was then too late. Settlements formerly under Nri had remained for about twenty years without Nri. It would have been impossible to re-instate the system, just as it would be impossible to suggest that Nigeria should today become a British colony again. Indeed, C.K. Meek warned that it should not be done.<sup>3</sup>

Why did the British administrators ignore the indigenous political system, which seemed to

offer what they were looking for? For whatever reason, they did not realise what it offered, but rather thought of it as an impediment to be destroyed. The destruction of the Nri system was a joint operation launched by the administrators and the missionaries.<sup>1</sup>

The British administrators wanted a state system similar to the Benin or Sokoto type. To them the Nri type was not like this, although they realized it had some control over many Igbo towns. The missionaries, however, were quick to perceive that the Nri type was like an ecclesiastical state, with an elaborate leadership system that precluded the new Christian converts from participating in their local politics. To allow the Nri polity to flourish was to impede Christian evangelism in Igbo land. The missionaries therefore encouraged the administrators to destroy it.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Role of the Missionaries in the Desacralization of Nri**

The Catholics were vociferous in their attack. In 1906 Bishop Shanahan launched his attack on 'the citadel of Satan' whose centre was Nri. Jordan, reporting Father Duhaze's campaign, wrote 'Kings and chiefs were approached and addressed in their native tongue, an experience very much to their liking. The very first town visited in the deep interior was that of Nri, the headquarters of ju-ju and voodoo and pagan priesthood for the whole Ibo tribe. This was a genuine attack on Satan in his citadel, for Nri represented the heart of paganism, although it was but a twenty mile walk from Onitsha.'<sup>3</sup>

The Eze Nri Obalike received the missionaries in a friendly way but made it clear that he was not ready to entertain any interference. Jordan, writing on the reports Duhaze and Vogler brought to Shanahan, said: 'The reports they brought back thrilled him immensely, for although the King of Nri and the chiefs of two or three nearby towns absolutely refused to allow any interference with pagan rites, they professed themselves quite pleased at the idea of their children "learning book", and they even admitted that it would be good for them to learn what the Father had to teach them about God.'<sup>4</sup> According to the Catholic Reverend Fathers of the period, the essence of Igbo paganism was ju-ju worship, cannibalism, slavery and polygamy. They argued that they had brought the light of salvation to Nri people. But

when Nri culture is compared with those who brought salvation to them it becomes doubtful whether this was the main motive for destroying the Nri system. The Nri believe in one Great Creator and yet have many cults; similarly the Catholics and Protestants believe in one God and have many cults, such as the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the cult of the Saints. Nri people were never cannibals; indeed it was abomination to kill and this doctrine was spread all over Igbo settlements. (Except that twins were not regarded as human beings and were destroyed, just as medieval Christian Europe destroyed witches, who were spared in the Nri system.) The type of Atlantic slave trade rampant in Igbo land was introduced by those European nations who then accused the Igbo of paganism.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Nri kings defined slaves as human beings that must not be killed, at a time when European slavers were killing slaves. Lastly, Nri are polygamists, which is an accepted form of marriage not only amongst the so-called pagans but also among Muslims. In any case, it is known that many European monogamists keep mistresses who are not in the same category as 'wife' and have no legal status in European family life.

It is therefore clear that the missionaries' disfavour directed at Nri was not based on the immoral system that they were accused of following. It was based on a common European attitude of the period, that things African were backward and evil.

One of the attacks launched on the 'citadel of Satan' was the rapid establishment of schools in Igbo land. By 1906 the Catholic School in Nri boasted 130 children. By 1914, when Lord Lugard amalgamated the north and south into one Nigeria, Nri had had its first batch of elementary educated Christians. The high level of literacy in Igbo land was the hard work of missionaries chasing 'Satan'.<sup>6</sup> Hence in 1949 Father Jordan wrote: 'The decision made by Father Shanahan to conduct a campaign against Satan in the interior of Southern Nigeria, and to pivot his attack on education, was a very far-reaching one. It entailed a break with tradition in the Prefecture under his control. ... Far more important than the Prefect's decision to concentrate on the Ibos in the interior rather than on the medley of tribes living along the waterways was his parallel decision to make the school the spearhead of his attack on Ibo paganism. This implied a

completely new vision of things. There were Catholic schools in various parts of the West coast of Africa, just as there were in Nigeria. But they were ancillary to the main work of evangelizing through the Christian village and the community of redeemed slaves.<sup>10</sup> (Plate 35).



Plate 35 The Roman Catholic School and Church in Nri, 1971

The Catholics were in no doubt about what their problem was and how to achieve a solution. Jordan, writing about the problem of leadership between 1910 and 1932, said: 'It is not possible to understand the struggle for the Faith in Southern Nigeria if one does not appreciate the position chiefs held there in Father Shanahan's time. To begin with, their power in most cases was not exercised over a district but just over a town. ... Each town had a whole list of titles which every free-born man was allowed to take, provided he could pay the initiation fees, which were often financially heavy. The better the title one took the more respect one got, and therefore the more moral weight one had. Incidentally, the higher the title the nearer one approached to *Maw*, or spirit; indeed the basis of respect for titled men lay in their association with the *Maw*. For that reason, the taking of the top title (the *ozo* was the highest taken in many towns) was always accompanied by a big sacrifice – generally of a horse or cow. ... For the common people, in the old days, the *ozo* man stood for the *Maw* (spirit) and received respect and reverence on that ground. Indeed it gave him something approximating to power over life and death. The senior *ozo* man, if possessed of initiative and personality, was easily acknowledged as chief.

But there was no question of sole arbitrary authority. The chief ruled in accordance with a code understood and accepted by all, and in conjunction with the other men of title. ... It would have been very hard to convert a chief anyway, because he was closely associated with spirit worship and would have had his whole way of life turned upside down by conversion to Christianity. He would probably have ceased to exercise great influence, too, as Christianity would naturally have debarred him from most social engagements, since these were associated with sacrifice or cult in one way or another.<sup>11</sup>

The Catholics decided to train their own men and make them challenge the traditional authority, thus creating the conflict situation between Christians and non-Christians that the District Officers of the period were describing. According to Jordan in 1908: 'Two events occurred in this Glankeen-like spot which may not have seemed of exceptional importance to Father Shanahan at the time of their happening, but which ultimately were very decisive indeed in the history of the Church there. One was the establishment of very friendly relations with Oji, Chief of Adazi, and the other was the selection of a boy in Nimo for training at the Catholic Mission of Onitsha. Chief Oji was wonderfully impressed by his first contact with a Catholic missionary and always retained sentiments of the deepest respect for them afterwards. He constantly used his influence to help them. His children were sent by him to church and school and practically the whole Oji family accepted the true Faith. One of his daughters, Eileen, came to Ireland in 1931 as a guest of the Holy Rosary Sisters in Killeshandra... The Nimo boy who was chosen for training at the Mission and afterwards baptised Michael, became chief of his town some years later and did tremendous work for the Church there. He managed a first-rate Catholic from the day of his Baptism, despite the great lure paganism always has for those who have wealth and influence enough to enjoy it. Wealth he certainly had, which he gave lavishly to every good and charitable cause, and when he died half a dozen years ago a great Catholic chief went to a great reward.'<sup>12</sup>

Nri people welcomed western education but resented the method adopted by the Catholics. According to the elders, converts were encouraged to flout the authority of the *ozo* men, burn their

ritual objects, break the taboos and reveal the secret of the ritual mask. Eze Nri withdrew his former co-operation and the destiny of the Church in Nri area was at stake. According to Jordan: 'It became clear, however, during 1907 that the school at Nri represented a Catholic oasis in a pagan desert, whereas a whole group of the towns first visited by Father Duhaze in his 1906 trek from Ogutu to Onitsha were sturdily maintaining and even expanding their schools... The main problem was to decide which town offered the best prospects from the point of view of elevation, water supply, density of population, distance from established schools and attitude towards education and Christianity. Finally, the choice fell on Ozubulu, where the school stood on an excellent site which commanded a Glankeen-like valley of water and woodland.'<sup>13</sup>

The encouragement of the destruction of traditional objects of worship spread out over all Igbo land. In this operation the educated Christians, who were mostly teachers and pastors, were used. They condemned the traditional title system, marriage, rituals, songs, music, arts and dance and labelled them 'things of Satan'. This continued into the 'fifties and early 'sixties, for in a speech delivered in the Eastern House of Assembly in 1956 by a member in connection with the proposal to establish an Eastern House of Chiefs, the member still referred to Eze Nri as nothing but a 'ju-ju priest'. The member is from Nimo and a relation of the Chief, Michael, mentioned above. He was one of those Catholic-trained leaders in Eastern Nigeria who were so profoundly coerced by the type of Mission education they had received that they denigrated the worth of their traditional culture.

But this trend was arrested in the mid 'sixties. With the increased number of enlightened and more liberal Igbo clergymen and Igbo-educated nationalists and politicians in the various Christian sects, attitudes towards traditional things began to change quickly.<sup>14</sup> Today the Roman Catholics permit their members to take the *ozo* title, provided the sacrifices to 'deities' and ancestors are not practised, and the Protestants allow divorce and condone the taking of an extra wife if done secretly.

One thing that caused great damage to the Christian reputation in Igbo land, and in Nri town in particular, was the long conflict between the

Catholics and the Protestants. Lineages, local councils, age-grades and other groupings that had Catholic and Anglican members broke up into factions reflecting the RCM v CMS conflict. This delayed effective political action in Nri town. Within the churches things began to fall apart. After about sixty years of evangelism many began to question and doubt the beliefs and techniques of the Catholic and Anglican missionaries. For example, my statistics on this matter in Nri show that those changing from traditional religion to Christianity were as follows: Agukwu village 5.4%, Akamkpisi 21.8%, and those changing from Christianity back to traditional religion: Agukwu 28.7%, Akamkpisi 32% and Diodo 17%. (see plate 36).

A large number of Christians no longer believe in their Church but do not revert to traditional religion. They form new churches or become members of the earlier syncretic religions formed in different parts of Nigeria, or remain neutral. At Nri there are about six of these religious bodies, each preaching its own new concept and new morality. (see tables 44 and 45).

### **The Role of some British Administrators in the De-Politicalization of Eze Nri**

During the early period of colonialism in Igbo land it was abundantly clear to the British administrators that the King of Nri held ritual sway over a large portion of Igbo land, but they were not at all certain of the nature of the political control exercised by the Eze Nri. Even then, religious control was considered anachronistic in the European political system of the time. The Nri system was viewed as an impediment to be removed in view of the constant reports missionaries were sending the district officers about the 'barbarism' of the Igbo people which was believed to be centred around Nri and Aro.<sup>15</sup>

The process of extermination of the Nri system did not take the form of military operations or expeditions, for Nri had no army. It could therefore be carried out within the framework of the general directives for establishing British influence emanating from the colonial government. Hence the demolition of the Nri system was not reported, as the expeditions against Benin or Aro or Sokoto were reported in the British press, to the Colonial Office and the British Parliament.

Let us briefly examine the techniques used by





Plate 36 *Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim, Nri, 1972*

some of the British administrators, encouraged by missionaries, in paralysing what remained of the Nri hegemony, first between 1907 and 1911, and secondly, between 1912 and 1960. With the advent of the British government in Igbo land, Nri was included in the Awka native or council area. In 1906 Nri became part of another, the Agula, court area. Eze Nri Obalike was made to attend these courts as the leader. His first attendance at court in Awka was remarkable, for according to Northcote Thomas, when Eze Nri appeared 'the whole assembly rose and prepared to flee – so great is the awe which he inspired'.<sup>16</sup>

It was considered an abomination for Eze Nri to leave Nri after his coronation. He ruled but was never seen by the people of his hegemony. Nri Obalike considered going to Awka a degradation of his power, authority, dignity, reputation, personality and sacredness. As might be expected, he promptly turned down the offer of 'warrant' chiefship on the grounds that he was not ready to 'sit and argue' with his *ozo* men in Nri, let alone *ozo* men and non-*ozo* men of other towns who were also appointed warrant chiefs. Indeed, this was the last political appointment of any Eze Nri under British rule and under African governments.

Secondly, Eze Nri Obalike was forced to abrogate all abominations that Eze Nri had imposed on Igbo settlements. In August 1911, the leaders of Igbo settlements were invited to Nri by the British administrators and in their presence the

ritual of abrogation of all abominations was enacted, followed by the announcement that Eze Nri's control over them had ceased. It was also added that Nri agents must not visit their settlements. Most intelligence reports of this period are almost completely silent about this action against Nri political organization. In some reports it was recorded only in a few lines and then reported as an act directed against the killing of twins. But this ban is still echoed in the oral tradition of Nri and towns that sent their leaders to Nri, and in D.C. Tovey's field report which was deposited in the Awka Divisional Office.<sup>17</sup>

Thirdly, Eze Nri was henceforth ignored by eliminating him from the new political system. A type of 'psychological warfare' was directed against Nri by both the Church and the administrators, who alleged that Eze Nri was a 'ju-ju priest' and had no political functions.

There is abundant evidence in some of the intelligence reports that the officers recognized the importance of *ozo*-titled men in the government of the various towns, yet the missionaries at Onitsha, the headquarters of the administration, who were against the *ozo* title saw to it that the *ozo* men were relegated to the background. Thus, instead of the British officers appointing the *ozo* men who were traditional leaders to be chiefs of their villages and towns, they appointed new leaders, most of whom were not *ozo* men. It was therefore not surprising that one of the reasons

for the warrant chief system collapsing was that problems were created by the type of leadership installed by the British.<sup>18</sup>

It is, however, interesting to note that up to 1930 the Lieutenant Governor was still making efforts to find out the status of Eze Nri. Meek, the then government anthropologist, was consulted. In a minute written in 1930 Meek said, 'No concrete proposals are put forward, but it is tentatively suggested that the priest chiefs of Nri and Oteri might be given considerable judicial or administrative authority. This cannot be done at present as far as Nri is concerned as there is, apparently, no Eze Nri functioning. The general question can hardly be decided without considerable investigation into the former functions of the Eze Nri and Oteri and the question of how far those functions can be adjusted to a changed outlook. It is no good attempting to revive an institution which depended on beliefs no longer held by the majority of people... In the meantime it might be asked if the Eze of Oteri is a member of any native court and what is the extent of his authority in Oteri itself and what would be the attitude of the towns which were directly under the influence of Nri and Oteri.'<sup>19</sup> But in 1931 Meek had this to say about Nri, which in a way contradicted his minute addressed to the Lieutenant Governor in 1930: 'Another source of religious and political influence in the Division was Nri, the centre of the famous priest chief of Awka Division. Nri is pronounced Nhi by the Ibo of Nsukka. In a number of towns the principal cult of the town is one which is said to have been introduced by immigrants from Nri...it is noteworthy that in most towns owning a cult of Nri origin the priest who introduced the cult became the Eze or ruler of the town.' Indeed, a year afterwards, Meek discovered Nri lineages at Nsukka, where the rulers of the town were Nri men. Nsukka is about sixty miles northeast of Nri and was one of the northerly areas once under Eze Nri's hegemony.<sup>20</sup>

In 1932, Stapledon, another District Officer, visited Nri and interviewed the elders, and reported that *Ndi Nze* (another name for *ozo* men) were both the judicial and executive council and that meetings were held in Eze's house or *Iyi Azi* or *Eke* or *Anwo Oye*. He said that the Eze opened the meetings, he being the recognised head, and if there was no Eze the senior titled man did. Stapledon emphasized the importance of *ozo*-

titled men by ending his report thus: 'Six Roman Catholics and the Protestants attended the meetings, all of them young men. They stated that they wished to take part in the improvement and development of their town if they could see the way to do it. The most prominent among them (a Protestant) said that if the mission authorities removed the ban he would take the title. They understand that there are negotiations between the Government and the mission authorities pleading and they are awaiting the result.'<sup>21</sup>

The new Christian Igbo men, most of them educated teachers and pastors, were eager to participate in the local politics of their community. But leadership in local politics involved taking the *ozo* title which gave a candidate the right to participate in discussions at a higher level and sit on the panel of policy makers. The missionaries were not ready to allow them to take the *ozo* title, because that would mean a reversion to paganism. But the missionaries wanted their clients to be in the forefront of local politics, otherwise the interests of the mission might suffer greatly.<sup>22</sup> The missionaries, whose headquarters were at Onitsha and Awka, brought pressure to bear on the various administrative officers, some of whom were Catholics and Protestants. The result of this was a determined effort by both the administration and missionaries to crush the office of Eze Nri and that of titled men by ignoring them.<sup>23</sup>

The administration's problems are clearly demonstrated in an intelligence report numbered FIL 606 Vol. 1, dated 1933-1934. The report referred to Nri and Oteri as '...important religious centres and the fount of honour of the *ozo* title system.' With regard to the conflict between the missionaries and the traditional *ozo* leaders, it said: 'As might be expected from the foregoing, schools are numerous and while Adazi is a Roman Catholic centre with three Fathers, Agulu is the centre of CMS pastoral activity with an African pastor. As their missions have generally regarded the *ozo* title system with disfavour owing to the pagan religious rites usually connected with it, there is conflict between native law and custom, which in some towns forbids an untitled man to consult at a meeting, and the legitimate aspiration of the Christian (and consequently literate) elements. To these circumstances must be attributed in no small degree the choice of the people of the system of re-organization which is now pro-

posed.<sup>24</sup> In section 19 of the same report the officer wrote: 'The objects of title taking were religious, but titles also had the practical advantages of conferring honour...' and in section 22 he reported the conflict in greater detail, thus: 'The advance of Christianity has tended to break down the title system on which the ancient administration was so largely based, and the literate elements debarred by custom from taking part in the consultations at public meetings have been compelled to exert their influence where and as they could and, lately, to press for consideration as a separate community in each town. Their example has encouraged the untitled pagans to follow suit and still further disorganize the ancient system. With Christianity and "paganism" thus placed in opposite political camps, and the breach constantly growing wider, it is not unnatural that the people should be doubtful as to how reorganization on native lines could be effected with justice to all parties, and welcome advice. It is, they argue, the coming of the European that has brought about the present state of affairs and it is therefore the duty of the European to help them find a way out.' The officer argued that the objects of title taking were religious and at the same time that the ancient administration was largely based on the title system. Such contradictory statements were all efforts to play down the role of the *ozo* title in traditional administration and to provide a rationale for the system they wanted to introduce.

The type of reorganized system introduced was a mixed council composed of representatives from different units of the town. The net result was that most of the traditional leaders were not selected and those selected were not happy to sit in the same council as those they did not consider their social equals. Also, all the educated Christians were generally represented in the council. In a place like Nri this policy gave rise to the operation of two systems. The Eze Nri and his council of *Ndi Nze* controlled the local affairs, while the local council installed by the administration had no control of local affairs, with the exception of tax collection and functioning as a communication link between the local community and the administration. By 1972 a dual system, the one 'traditional' and the other 'modern', existed in Nri.

The political importance of the *ozo* title was therefore clear in the minds of the junior district officers, but they were committed to avoiding any

challenge of the opinion originally expressed by their superior officers. They therefore recorded their genuine findings in their notes, which they deposited in the Awka Divisional Office, and compiled reports that reflected the opinion held by their superior officers, or opinions already expressed by M.D.W. Jeffreys or G.K. Meek.

In 1929 an Assistant District Officer, D.C. Tovey, visited Nri and held interviews with the elders. In the intelligence report Tovey vividly made it clear who governed Nri town during an interregnum, and yet in 1932 and 1957 C.K. Meek and G.I. Jones respectively were still in doubt about the problems of an interregnum in Nri and the political roles and status of Eze Nri. D.C. Tovey wrote: 'Obalike of Uruoji, the last Eze Nri, died in 1927. The former Eze Nri had been Enweliani of Obeagu. When Enweliani died his son Asiagbu took charge, his powers being renewed every seven years for over twenty years. On Asiagbu's death, the senior title member in Agukwu, Okeke Naka, took his place...on Okeke Naka's death Ewuocha Obu, his successor as senior title member, took over and remained in charge until Obalike was made Eze Nri...Obalike's son, Oko Nwazenri, would have taken charge on his father's death...Oko was asked to pay £1 to cover the loss and refused. The elders then decided unanimously that the senior title member should succeed Obalike as head of the town instead of Oko.' He also specifically pointed out that meetings were held in Eze Nri's house. Tovey's reports went unnoticed at Awka Divisional Office.<sup>25</sup>

This 'blindness' towards the status of Eze Nri, whether or not deliberate, was possibly excusable at the time but was not so by 1957, when G.I. Jones continued to re-echo the errors of earlier observers. For one thing, Jones never conducted any interviews in Nri and did not study the system. He simply referred to Jeffreys' work, which was mainly on the rituals of Nri kingships. It is indeed astonishing that he wrote in such a positive and authoritative tone about Nri kingship in a booklet that is now almost regarded as a 'Bible' in some circles. He wrote: 'As already mentioned in paragraph 40, Nri also had a chief—the Eze Nri—but his powers were ritual rather than political and he played no part in the government of his village community. (The ritual aspect of his office has been described at length



by Dr M.D.W. Jeffreys in a report to the Nigerian Government in 1934 and in the *Divine Umundri King of Igbo land*, an unpublished doctoral thesis).<sup>26</sup>

This statement by Jones contradicted what Jeffreys said in Chapter 10 of his thesis, from which Jones is quoting: '...if the case were tried before the Eze Nri and the verdict was death, then the Eze Nri would give the order for the accused to die... It was pointed out that he might act as a peace-maker if fighting occurred between two towns; he would send for the elders of the two towns and endeavour to settle the dispute.'<sup>27</sup> Also, Nri town has always been under the direct political control of Eze Nri and his two important councils, *Nzemabua* and *Nde Nze*. To write that Eze Nri played no part in the government of his village community is an unfortunate statement which is not based on fact.

It is indeed unfortunate, because Jones was in a position to know of the role that Eze Nri played with the British administrators between 1906 and 1911, and to know of the reports made by Father Duhaze recorded in the book 'Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria', which states '...for although the king of Nri and the chiefs of two or three nearby towns absolutely refused to allow any interference with pagan rites, they professed themselves quite pleased at the idea of their children "learning book"...' <sup>28</sup>

Jones was also aware of the numerous intelligence reports deposited at Awka, for he was based at Awka while conducting his survey. Furthermore, in 1957, when Jones was conducting his survey, the ruling Eze Nrijofo – who was crowned in 1937 – had been ruling for twenty years, yet Jones wrote 'There has been no Eze Nri for about thirty years, a new one has now been installed and the people of Nri are anxious to see him recognized by government and given a seat in a regional house of chiefs...' <sup>29</sup> Jones' apparent ignorance of happenings related to his investigation is puzzling. The last Eze Nri died in 1927 and Nri Tabansi succeeded him in 1937. How Jones arrived at the thirty years mentioned in his report is still more puzzling.

The reaction against Jones' report in Njikoka District Council was indicative of the feelings of disappointment experienced by the members of the Njikoka Council at the failure of the regional government to appoint Eze Nri a first-class chief. Councillor Ogbalu moved a motion, which was

seconded by Councillor and Hon. Osita Agwuna, to present their feelings to the Regional Government. In his summing up, the Council chairman said that it was appropriate for the Council to request the Regional Government to appoint the Eze Nri a First Class Paramount Chief. He said it would be ridiculous to appoint some chiefs First Class and to leave out the Eze Nri who crowns other Eze.

It was resolved that 'the Regional Government be requested to include the Eze Nri as of right in the category of the First Class Paramount Chiefs in the Eastern Region and to include him as one of the members of the proposed Eastern House of Chiefs.'<sup>30</sup> For a District Council as large as that of Njikoka, which included towns such as Abagana, Nimo and Enugu-Ukwa, to have reacted against the omission of the Regional Government which was probably based on Jones' report, challenged the conclusion reached by Jones that the Eze Nri had no political functions. At least one political function of a king is that he gives prestige to his people. Njikoka District Councillors were hurt because their Eze Nri was ignored. At Nri the *Nzemabua* council were shocked when Jones' report was read out to them. They said that Jones was 'doing politics'.<sup>31</sup>

This unfortunate situation in which the Eze Nri was kept in cold storage by the early British senior administrators was salvaged by a British archaeologist, Professor Thurstan Shaw. His excavations astounded the world of archaeologists, anthropologists, historians and political scientists, and the study of Nri culture became imperative.

### The Dynamics of Tradition and Modernity in Nri

Between 1905 and 1972 four systems of local government were tried but all failed, in Nri in particular. The first was around 1905, when the British included Nri in what was called the Awka native court area. By 1906 a new system was introduced, in which Nri became part of another court area called Agulu court area. At a public meeting each town appointed a certain number of representatives to form the court, and four of these were chosen by the District Officer to sit each month. Certain persons were appointed warrant chiefs and these persons included those who were not leaders in their lineages or towns. By



1929 the Aba Ngwa women's protest movement and the economic depression, which affected the selling of palm produce, signalled the collapse of the warrant chief system.

About 1932 the system was modified to allow all members to sit at every hearing in order to avoid the risk of corrupt practices, but again this did not go far towards solving the problem. In 1932 a new administrative system, called the Native Administration System, was introduced, but it became unworkable in 1950. In 1952 the local government system based on the local council was introduced and this remained after independence. In 1971 the local government system was abandoned, because it was not able to generate community consciousness among the people, and a new system called the Community Council was introduced. It is believed that the new system will in due course reduce the social distance between the community and the then East Central State government.

In this new system, the position of Eze Nri and his *Nzemabua*, about which I doubt the government is knowledgeable, has never been defined in spite of the fact that towns around still regard Eze Nri as, at least, the religious head of the traditional religion, and he and his councillors are regarded as the traditional rulers of Nri town.

These forsaken traditional elite groups have not remained inactive. They continually protect their leadership position in Nri by subtly undermining all the government's efforts to establish effective local government in Nri. Neither the British administration nor the new African administration have ever realized this.

In Nri, the local effect of not defining the position of Eze Nri in the total political system by the Government is that a dual system of local government has emerged since the colonial era, viz., the local council, now called the Community Council, which is appointed according to the rules laid down by the government and is headed by a chairman, and the Eze Nri, his *Nzemabua* and *Ndi Nze* and, in recent times, the Nri Progress Union. Both operate side by side. But the effective administration of Nri is carried out by Eze Nri with his traditional councils and the Nri Progress Union. The Community Council is practically ineffective, but it is a useful show-piece, for when the divisional officer comes all its members go to welcome him and pretend that they are effectively

in control. Thus the political game of sustaining the status of Eze Nri is played locally.

### The NPU, the Community Council and the Eze Nri

With few exceptions, the Nri Progress Union took over the traditional political tasks of the executive, or leading, age-grade. Its main functions are directed towards the development and modernization of Nri. The central Union settles the civil disputes of any of its members who decide to refer such matters to them. Meetings are generally held in a big town hall built by Nri people. The Nri Progress Union handles all matters categorized as non-traditional; matters like the development of the town fall into this class. Traditional matters such as rules about taking the *ozo* title, taboos, abominations, some types of land disputes, inheritance and marriage laws are all handled by Eze Nri and his council.

The membership of the Union is composed not only of the new elite group of businessmen, wealthy men and the educated and 'westernized' men, but also includes the traditional elite, including all men at home and abroad. (Plate 37). This broadly based new organization encapsulates and employs both traditional and new values in Nri. For example, the two past Presidents of the Union were wealthy men who had also taken the *ozo* title, and most of the present Executive members have taken the *ozo* title.

Possession of the *ozo* title is not explicitly necessary for leadership in the Union, but it is implicitly important for it gives prestige and continuity to the Union. Continuity in the sense that the *ozo* men are all members of the traditional state council and also members of the various *ozo* alliances in Nri and all are labelled as being under 'the owner of *ozo* title', the Eze Nri.

Also all members of the Union are members of the lineages and of the various age-grades. This type of membership in both traditional and non-traditional groupings which are under Eze Nri, who is the constitutional head of Nri, with the Nri Progress Union spearheading modernization and development, gives Nri town an organizing strength and solidarity.

The president of the Nri Progress Union is not in opposition to the Eze Nri. According to Nri political thinking, the president of the Nri Progress



Plate 37 *The new elite. (left to right, bracketed figures) Mr R.I. Onuora, Vice-President NPU; Mr M.O. Mbolu, President General NPU; Mr O.N. Umeadi, barrister and legal adviser to NPU; Prince Dan Okolo, grandson of Eze Nri Obalike who died in 1927.*

Union is acting on behalf of Eze Nri, but the powers of the president and his executives are defined in a written constitution.

The president's duties are defined thus: 'The President shall be responsible for the good administration of all meetings. He shall convene meetings and maintain order and discipline at all such meetings. He shall be invested with an absolute control of the Union's meetings and his decisions shall be final except in circumstances necessitating matters that call for vote.'<sup>32</sup> (NPU, p. 1). The president or any officer can be removed by a vote of no confidence passed by a two-thirds majority of the 'House'.<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, the power and authority of Eze Nri are not defined by a written constitution. It is contained in the corpus of Nri tradition. As the Eze Nri and king of all who claim Nri connections, the Eze Nri has the power to veto any decisions reached by any political groupings in Nri, whether traditional or not, because it is held that *Nri Menri* has given him the authority to use this power, which is believed to be derived from *Chukwu*. But in practice the Eze Nri does not use this power, because the built-in checks and balances in the structural relationships within and between groupings nullify the possibilities of

his using this power. If one grouping fails to work effectively he would simply call upon another grouping to do so.

One important strength of the Nri Progress Union is that it can mobilize and raise money from all Nri men and women at home and abroad. This is because Nri people regard the Union as the 'modern voice' of Eze Nri. Funds thus collected are carefully used in the development of Nri town. The following development programmes were successfully undertaken by the Nri Progress Union between 1960 and 1972 under the leadership of M.O. Mbolu, a successful business man residing at Aba, who also holds the ozo title.

- (i) The building and maintenance of the Nri Postal Agency at a cost of about £8,000. (Plate 38).
- (ii) The building, equipping and running of the Nri Maternity Hospital at a cost of about £10,000 (including current expenditure up to January 1972).
- (iii) The building and furnishing of Nri Town Hall, including the cost of maintenance up to January 1972, at about £15,000.
- (iv) The repairing of roads and bridges inside Nri (not costed).

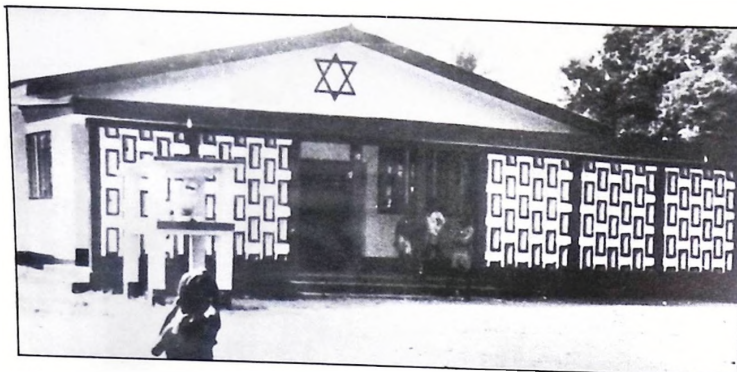


Plate 38 *Nri Postal Agency, built by the community under the direction of the Nri Progress Union.*

- (v) The payment of £4,000 to the Ministry of Works as a contribution for self-help projects in connection with the pipe-borne water project.
- (vi) The granting of free primary education to all Nri children schooling in Nri town between 1970 and 1972, costing approximately £4,000 per annum, which later increased to over £5,000.
- (vii) The rebuilding of the *Eke* market.
- (viii) The equipping of the Odinani Museum, Nri, in 1972 at a cost of about £450. (Plate 39)
- (ix) The cost of supporting the Eze Nri at about £500 per annum.
- (x) The promotion of sports, especially football, in Nri.

In Nri, the Nri Progress Union and the Community Council work in relative harmony with Eze Nri and his Council. There are no records of major conflicts in their relationship as in most Igbo towns, where the towns' Unions were once or are now at loggerheads with either traditional political groupings or the Community Council. This absence of a major conflict is not an accident of history. It has been achieved by the transformation and harmonization of the traditional and non-traditional. The non-traditional has been transformed to look traditional and acceptable to the traditional elite and the people generally, and the traditional has been transformed to look acceptable to the new elite. Both have been functionally harmonized to operate with minimum tension and avoid destructive conflicts. Furthermore, the inertia of tradition with regard to the concept of leadership

in Nri has produced a political discipline amongst the Nri people. This type of political discipline was succinctly described by one of my Nri informants when he said: 'Nri unity and obedience to Eze Nri are not based on fear or blindness; they are based on our past tradition. Eze Nri is our tradition, our glory, our unity, our hope, our everything.'

The function of the Community Council is to manage community affairs as an arm of the state government at the community level. It collects rates as stipulated by the government and encourages people to pay their taxes. It acts as a liaison between the town and the Divisional Officers at Awka. It is responsible for local development, but has no fund with which to embark on any respectable project. Its major handicaps are paucity of funds and a limited ability to win over the confidence of the people, because the core of Nri leadership is made up of members of the Nri Progress Union or State Council which commands influence and respectability in Nri. Most of those who stand for election to the Community Council are residuals or less active members of the Nri Progress Union. The traditional elite and the cream of the new elite are not interested in becoming members of the Community Council. Some see it as a redundant duplication of effort at the local level.

The Community Council co-exists peacefully with other elements of the local political structure and has failed to make any considerable impact on Nri, but it serves as a useful show-piece and a neutral communication link between the agents of the Central Government and the people of Nri.

The reign of Eze Nrijofo can therefore be





Plate 39 Opening of the Odinani Museum, Nri, 1972.  
(left to right) Mr M. O. Mbolu, President General NPU; Mr Dan Ibeke, Commissioner for Works, ECS; Mrs Ibeke; Dr Magnus Adiele, Commissioner for Education, ECS; Mrs Adiele; Mr D.C. Nwosu, Co-opted Member NPU; Mr R.I. Onuora, Vice-President NPU.

considered as a period of great revival in Nri. There is no doubt now that Eze Nri is one of the oldest known monarchs, whose power and fame was acknowledged for centuries in the Igbo culture area. The future of Nri kingship can be said to be

assured, for today, even though it lacks the pomp of power, it is rich in antiquity and the trappings of self-dignity and self-confidence, epitomized in the antiquities of its culture and preserved in the Igbo-Ukwu objects.

#### CHAPTER TEN: NOTES

1. M. CROWDER, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*. 1968. pp. 188-201.
2. M.D.W. JEFFREYS, *The Divine Umu Ndi: Kings of Igbo Land*, 1934, Chap. 2, pp. 1-30.  
Dr Jeffreys argued without any evidence that the Nri were Igala.
3. C.K. MEEK, Intelligence Report 1930, Enugu SP 6810/400.
4. J.D. JORDAN, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*, 1949, pp. 67-69, 76-79.
5. J.D. JORDAN, *Ibid*, p. 35.
6. J.D. JORDAN, *Ibid*.
7. J.D. JORDAN, *Ibid*.
8. J.D. JORDAN, *Ibid*.
- P.D. CURTIN, *The Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1800 in History of Africa*, Vol. I.
9. I am analysing the motives that propelled the missionaries into action in Igbo land. I am not making any value judgement on the actions. I will of course point out that the missionaries, especially the Catholics, brought many useful things into Igbo land.
10. J.D. JORDAN, *op. cit*.
11. J.D. JORDAN, *Ibid*.
12. J.D. JORDAN, *Ibid*.
13. J.D. JORDAN, *Ibid*.
14. Bishop Arinze's book *Igbo Sacrifice* 1971 is a typical example of an indigenous Catholic assessment of Igbo traditional religion. In this book he speaks of Nri religious influence in Igbo land and the unknown political implications in the past.
15. J.D. JORDAN, *op. cit*.
16. N.W. THOMAS, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*, Part I.



17. D.C. TOVEY, Field Report 1929, on Ujalli Court Area. Unclassified, Awka District Office.

18. AFIGBO, A.E., *The warrant chiefs' indirect rule in S.E. Nigeria, 1891-1929*, on warrant chief system.

19. C.K. MEEK, *op. cit.*

20. An Ethnographical Report on the Peoples of the Nsukka-Onitsha Province, Lagos, 1931.

21. STAPLEDON, Intelligence Report, 1932, Nri, Awka Divisional Office.

22. F.K. EKECHI, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igbo Land, 1857-94*, 1972. pp. 83-113.

A similar opinion was also expressed by F.K. Ekechi.

23. J.D. JORDAN, *op. cit.*

24. Intelligence Report on Towns of Adazi-Enu, etc. 1933-34, FIL 606. Vol. 1. Awka Divisional Office. (Not numbered).

25. See Note 17 above. (Notebook not numbered).

26. Jones' Report of the Position, Status and Influence of Chiefs and Natural Rulers in the Eastern Region of Nigeria, Enugu, 1957. pp. 10 and 21.

27. M.D.W. JEFFREYS, *The Divine Umu Ndiri: Kings of Igbo Land*, 1934, Chapter X, pp. 24-26.

Indeed, Jeffreys made two statements which contradicted one another in the same passage. He started by saying that the

Eze Nri had a political function and ended by saying that he had only ritual power. Jeffreys worked at a period when political anthropology was not well developed. But Jones reporting and relying on contradictory aspects of Jeffreys' work is inexcusable.

28. J.D. JORDAN, *op. cit.*

29. See Jones' Report in Note 12 above.

30. Extract from monthly meetings of Njikoka District Council held in the Council Hall, Abagana, on 27th December 1958 and 16th January 1959. It is interesting to note that later, in 1960, one of the Councillors, Hon. Osita Agwuna of Enugu-Ukwu, an ex-politician associated with the Zikist movement and a former parliamentarian, proclaimed that he was the Eze of Enugu-Ukwu and Igwe of Umu Nri. He is still struggling hard to sustain his new claims.

31. 'Doing politics' means playing politics. It was believed that G.I. Jones' report was biased because they believed without real evidence that Zik influenced him, contrary to his speech of 28th March, 1956, in which he stressed the role of Eze Nri in Igbo land.

32. Nri Progress Union: Constitution in Nri Secretariat, 1971, p. 1 (not dated).

33. *Ibid.* p. 8.

## Conclusion

It remains for me to estimate what has been achieved in this book.

First it may be necessary to summarize the main trend of the book. It has been demonstrated that the basic structure of Nri political system is patrilineal segmentary lineages. The formation of corporate political groupings and their interaction are not mainly derived from or generated by the segmentary system. Rather, these processes are mainly derived from and generated by factors arising from territoriality, lineage equality and inequality, marriage alliance groups, lineage alliance, struggle for leadership within and between lineages and temples, the title-system, the age-grade system, the diverse interest groups, and the functional relationships based on the diversification of religious and economic roles of lineages.

On top of these diverse lineages and groupings is superimposed a sacred king called Eze Nri, who is regarded as a spirit and a supernatural being. The Eze Nri is not a chief priest and does not perform the function of a chief priest generally ascribed to him by casual observers. He does not even offer sacrifices or use charms and medicine like the Yoruba, Benin or Igala kings.<sup>1</sup> Rather, sacrifices are offered by the palace's chief priest to *Nri Menri*, and the Eze Nri is considered a living member of *Nri Menri*.

Eze Nri is believed to live on the threshold of human and supernatural worlds. He plays a double role – that of a spirit, *Mmuo*, and a supernatural being, *Alusi*, and that of a king, *Eze Nri*. These roles are complementary. To perform these roles he is hemmed in by taboos which protect him from the defilement of the human world. Through his palace officials, *odibo eze*, he is able to communicate with the world of men, and through his state councils of *Ndi Ichie*, called

*Nzemabua* and *Ndi Nze*, he conducts the internal and external affairs of Nri.

Nri society is stratified into five major taboo-observing groups arranged in a hierarchical and pyramidal order with the Eze Nri at the top, followed by the *ozo*-titled men and next by the non-*ozo* men, and then by married women and children at the bottom. The major instrument of communication and control between these groups is framed in the symbolic code of tabooed actions – abomination – purification, and the major behaviour patterns of individuals and groups are determined and directed by these symbolic codes. The Eze Nri's palace is the centre from which this system of communication and control emanates. Since this system of communication and control pervades every aspect of Nri life, that is the political, religious, economic and cultural, it is misleading to analyse or pronounce statements on one aspect of the Nri system in isolation, as did M.D.W. Jeffreys, C.K. Meek and G.I. Jones.

With this system of communication and control Eze Nri was able to manage the internal affairs of Nri centred around the palace and the lineages, and the external affairs of Nri, which involved some degree of ascendancy over twenty (or more) Igbo settlements scattered in an area of about 4,500 square miles in the Igbo culture area. The history of Nri indicates that the hegemony that emerged out of this system probably reached its apogee between the thirteenth and late seventeenth centuries and, thereafter, gradually declined until in 1911 it was finally halted by the British.

The state system and Nri hegemony derived their cohesion not from militarism but from integration through a complex set of ritual beliefs and values.

One of the chief characteristics of the Nri system compared with some other West African

forest states is the marked development of sacred kingship and a religiously based state and hegemony.

Another distinctive aspect of the Nri political system is the conceptualization, allocation and distribution of power and authority.

In Nri ideology, the sources of power and authority are different.<sup>4</sup> Political power, *ike ichi*, which is regarded as ability to rule or act on a person or a group and ability to take decisions, is believed to be derived from *Chukwu*. Thus, power is of divine origin. Political power is symbolically represented in the *alo Nri Menri* staff. It is believed that Eze Nri derived his political and religious power from *Chukwu* through Eri, the founder of the Eri clans in the Anambra river valley. Eze Nri established the *ozo* title and allocated this power to *ozo* men. This is enacted in the ceremony of the giving of the *alo* staff to an *ozo* man during the taking of the *ozo* title. The *ozo*-titled men are thus authorized to be the legitimate and official leaders in their lineages. The power of the lineage leaders is thus derived from the power held by Eze Nri. Hence the power of the state symbolized in the *alo Nri Menri* staff is stronger and more effective than that held by the lineage leaders singly or collectively. The power held by Eze Nri is not absolute because it is defined in terms of taboos, beliefs and norms observed by groups which derive their existence and continuity from conformity to these rules expressed in taboos. Thus a system of checks and balances is inherently built into the system.

On the other hand, authority in Nri is conceptualized as the right to use power. It is described as 'the power and right to use the *ofo* staff', *ike iji ofo*. Authority is symbolized by the *ofo* staff. In Nri thinking authority has two loci: the authority centred around Eze Nri and that centred around the maximal lineages and delegated downwards to the minimal lineages.

The authority centred around Eze Nri is believed to be derived from *Nri Menri*, the collective spirit of the dead Eze Nri and Eri. This is symbolized in the *ofo-Nri Menri* staff. This authority is delegated to *ozo*-titled men since they are holders of the *ofo-ozo* staffs, which are derived from the *ofo-Nri Menri*.

The authority centred around the lineages is derived from the dead ancestors of lineages, the *ozo*-titled and the non-*ozo*-titled ones. This

authority is symbolized in the collective *ofo-ozo* of all the dead ancestors kept in the collective temple. This collective *ofo-ozo* is also referred to as *ofo-okpala* since only first sons inherit them and become custodians of the temple in which they are kept.

Nri lineages are segmentary in character, but segmentary opposition is unimportant in political action. Lineages are arranged hierarchically from the minimal to the maximal. Similarly, authority is regarded as hierarchical. The authority of a lineage to exercise its political and ritual rights is legitimized by reference to the lineage *ofo*. This authority is vested in the leaders of the lineages who should be *ozo* men, or the elders, *okpala*.

In Nri thinking, the lineages have no founding *alo*, but they do have founding *ofo*. In political terms this means that they have no power but do have the authority to use power derived from Eze Nri. So the lineage elders without *ozo* titles have no *alo* and so no power, but they could use the authority derived from the ancestors to manage the lineage affairs. The *ozo* title holder has both *alo* and *ofo*, that is, he has power and the authority to use the power. Hence the *ozo* leader supercedes the *okpala* leader. Hence every Nri aspires to take the *ozo* title. The taking of the *ozo* title involves the institutionalized distribution of wealth in the form of payments and feasting. Accumulated wealth is converted into social prestige and this is physically expressed in the giving and receiving of *alo* and *ofo* staffs which symbolize power and authority. Thus the *ozo* title is an institution that creates and maintains leaders. The *ozo* title is therefore a function in Nri kingship. Both are inseparable aspects of the Nri political leadership system.

It is also clear that the degree and nature of the complexity of a state system varies with the type of state. In the Nri case, the nature of diversification and specialization achieved at the state level differs from the type commonly associated with militarized states. It lacked an elaborate hierarchy of officials whose offices were associated with specific state duties. Rather, it had a less complex hierarchy of titled officials specialized in carrying out generalized state duties with a few specialized functions. But a different pattern emerges at the lineage level. The complexity attained is borne out by the high degree of specialization and diversification that occurs in the lineages.

It seems that in terms of complexity a militarized state like Benin, Agbor or the Yoruba chiefdoms is the reverse of a ritualized state like Nri. Hence, it may be valid to argue that militarized states like Benin are more complex at the state level than at the clan or lineage level, while ritualized states like Nri are more complex at the clan or lineage level than at the state level. If this is accepted it seems naive to argue that one is more complex than the other. It seems they represent two alternative systems for achieving some degree of

centralization.

This study refutes scholars' tendency to refer to the Eze Nri as a 'priestly official' or say that his function was/is 'non-political'. It argues that it is entirely incorrect to claim that the Igbo east of the Niger have no kings and no state systems, or that the state system was derived from Igala. Such generalizations about the Igbo must no longer go unchallenged. Nri developed a kingdom and a hegemony, and is one of the most ancient and renowned Igbo civilizations.

#### CHAPTER ELEVEN: NOTES

1. The Benin, Yoruba and Igala kings are regarded as sacred kings. But their sacred power seems 'limited' by the fact that they use charms and medicine to rejuvenate their power. The Oba of Benin uses a knife and slaughters a goat in sacrifices. The Yoruba kings could be asked to commit suicide. These actions indicate that their sacred power is limited. The Oba of Benin has a cult of the head. The head is only an aspect of the Oba's personality. The Eze Nri is regarded as a *Mmuo* and an *Alusi*. Since he is a spirit, a supernatural being, he does not need to be rejuvenated.

2. In Nri ideology political power, ritual power and economic power are all aspects of power, *ike*.



## Appendix

### Appendix 1

#### Example of Corroboration Chart used during field work

Items of oral tradition collected were cross-checked, for validity and reliability, in this type of chart.

		Evidence other than Oral Tradition									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Items of Oral Tradition in Nri	Form Transmitted	Occurrence Elsewhere	Social Structure – Behaviour Pattern	Genealogy	Archaeology	Material Culture (ethnographic objects)	Pattern of Diffusion	Linguistic	Arts, Drama, Proverbs, etc	Documentary	SCORE
Migration from Anambra	As fact	1	1	1	–	1	1	1	1	–	7
<i>Ichi</i> marks introduced by Nri	Mythical and songs	1	1		1	1	–	–	1	1	6
Division of estate by Nri Ifikuanim	As fact	–	1		1	1	–	–	1	–	4

SCORES: 1 — (not used for analysis, only recorded)

2 to 3 — Weak

4 to 6 — Medium

7 to 9 — Strong

## Appendix 2

The Relationship of Types of Sources used in  
Reconstructing Nri History

Dates in Centuries A.D.	Archaeological and Antiquities	Oral Tradition of Nri (Systematised)	Nri Total Genealogies (Systematised)	Early and Recent Documents	Anthropological Studies
8th					
9th	Shaw's work (shows <i>Ichi</i> marks)	Unknown inhabitants of the Anambra			
10th		ERI	ERI		
11th		Nri Ifikuanim	Nri Ifikuanim		
12th		Nri Namoke	Nri Namoke		
13th		Eze Nri Buife	Eze Nri Buife		
14th	Hartle's work (shows <i>Ichi</i> marks)	Eze Nri (forgotten)			
15th		Eze Nri Jiofo I	Eze Nri Jiofo		
16th		Eze Nri (forgotten)			
17th		Eze Nri Anyamata			
18th		Eze Nri Fenenu		Duarte Pacheco on trade in Igbo land	
19th	* Onwuejeogwu's Ethnographic collections - Odinani Museum, Nri	Eze Nri Agu		Barbot on trade in Igbo land	
20th		Eze Nri Apia	Eze Nri Alike and Apia	Equiano on <i>Ichi</i>	
		Eze Nri Ezemilo	Eze Nri Ezemilo	Adam and Baikie on <i>Ichi</i>	Major Leonard 1895
		Eze Nri Ewenetem	Eze Nri Ewenetem	Intelligence reports. 1914-34.	Northcote Thomas 1910.
		Eze Nri Enweleani	Eze Nri Enweleani	Missionaries. 1906-20.	Talbot, P.A. 1920-24. Meek, C.K. 1931. Jeffreys, M.D.W. 1934. Onwuejeogwu,* 1966-72

\* The writer

## Appendix 3 List of Towns Visited 1966-1972

Akuku †**	Agulu **	Enugu-Ngwó	Isiokpo	Ndikelionwu
Agbor †	Akpugu	Emekuku	Kwalle (Akoko) †**	Nimo
Aboh †	Abatete **	Elele	Mbaise	Nisi
Asa †	Abacha **	Ekwulobia	Mgbadwu	Nibo
Asaba †**	Awkuzu ‡	Issele-ukwu †**	Mba-ukwu **	Nibo (Nsukka) **
Ahoda	Amanuke ‡	Illah †**	Nzam	Ogboli-Adeni
Akwete	Abagana	Igrita	Nkwerre	Ogwashi-Ukwu †**
Aba	Achalla †	Ibekwu	Nsukka **	Odiani
Anam	Bende	Izi	Nteje ‡	Oko
Aro Chukwu	Diobu	Ihiala **	Nri *‡	Ohaffia
Afikpo	Ezi †	Ibusa †**	Nsugbe ‡	Obowo
Abakiliki	Enugu-Ezike	Igboarim ‡	Nneni **	Owerri
Agwu	Enugu-Ukwu **	Ichida **	Nnewi **	Okigwe
Aro Ndiuzogu	Eha-Amufu	Igbo-Ukwu	Nnanka	Orlu
Awka	Enugu Agidi **	Isu Njaba	Nneofia **	Onitsha
Aguleri ‡	Eha-Alumona **	Isafia	Nneobi	Obosi **
Adazi **	Eke	Isu	Nneokwa	Agidi
Oreeri **	Udi			
Owa †**	Umuleri			
Oraukwu **	Ute †**			
Oguta	Umunze			
Ogbunike	Ukpo			
Obior	Umudioka			
Oba **	Umuahia			
Opi	Ubulu-uku			
Rumu Okoroshe	Umani			
Rumuji				

## Note:

Towns in this list were places in which I stayed up to one day interviewing and observing.

\* Based at Nri

\*\* Towns with Nri lineages

† West Igbo towns

‡ Eri clans.

## Appendix 4 Some Important Informants, 1966-1972, in Nri

Name of Informants	Village or Town	Status	Age in 1967
Eze Nri, Tabansi*	Nri	Eze Nri	73
Okonkwo Maduka*	Agbadana, Nri	Ozo	55+
Okeke Okonkwo*	Agbadana, Nri	Ozo	58+
Okafor Anago	Agbadana, Nri	Ozo	58+
Uba Okoye	Agbadana, Nri	Ozo	65+
Emeufe Aguolu	Agbadana, Nri	Ozo	67
Nzegbunem Okolo	Agbadana, Nri	Ozo	58
Umadi Nwoso*	Agbadana, Nri	Priest of Alusi	65+
Anidumaka Okeke*	Uruoji, Nri	Dibia Afa	80+
Aguenu Ikedigwe*	Uruoji, Nri	Priest of Obu	72
Nwaokoye Odenigo*	Uruoji, Nri	Ozo and Priest	80+
Onuora Obumkaneme	Uruoji, Nri	Priest of Obu	70
Ofoelo Igidigi*	Uruoji, Nri	Ozo, Pensioner	66
J. Onyeso	Obeagu, Nri	Ozo, Pensioner	
Nwaokeke	Obeagu, Nri	Ozo	70
Akunne Ewuocha*	Obeagu, Nri	Ozo, Priest	80+
Nnanyelu Ezeana	Obeagu, Nri	Ozo	70
Anumba Okeke*	Obeagu, Nri	Ozo, Priest	75
Ogboo Okoye	Obeagu, Nri	Ozo, Dibia	70
Dumaka Molokwu*	Obeagu, Nri	Ozo	70
Ofokaogu	Diodo, Nri	Lineage head	65
Akpu Ogbummuo	Diodo, Nri	Lineage head	58
Alusi Egbobe*	Diodo, Nri	Priest	67
Okafor Okoye*	Diodo, Nri	Lineage head	70
James Okonkwo*	Diodo, Nri	Ozo	58
Okeke Idemmili	Diodo, Nri	Lineage head	66
Atuanya Obiaguyim*	Uruofolo, Nri	Ozo	64
Okoye Adikwa*	Uruofolo, Nri	Lineage head	70
Okeke Ocha	Uruofolo, Nri	Ozo	62
Okafor Ikedigwe	Uruofolo, Nri	Ozo	58
Okafor Mmaduka	Uruofolo, Nri	Ozo	55
Anakwue Eki	Umu Diana, Nri	Ozo	65+
Obiefune Nduka*	Umu Diana, Nri	Ozo	65+
Okoye Enemmuo	Umu Diana, Nri	Christian	61+
Duese Emea*	Agbana, Nri	Lineage head	71+
Obidigbo Emea*	Enuora, Nri	Lineage head	75
Okeke Ezeaguna	Enuora, Nri	Lineage head	66

*continued overleaf*



## Appendix 4 (continued)

## Other Towns

Okoloye Nri Agu*	Oreri (Nri Agu)	Lineage head	70+
Nwaokonko Okoye	Oreri (Nnakwa)	Lineage head	70+
Ezemba	Igbo-Ukwu (Obune)	Lineage head	65
Okonkwo Okolie*	Igbo-Ukwu	Lineage head	70+
Udemmadu	Aguleri	Lineage head	70+
Anieke Nwaeke*	Aguleri (Umezeora)	Lineage head	70+
P. Okoye	Enugu-Ukwu	Idi of Enugu-Ukwu	65+
Nwachukwu Nwauma*	Awka (Igwu)	Lineage head	65+
Nwaokoye Awka	Awka (Umudioka)	Lineage head and Smith	70+
Nwaeke	Adazi (Nukwu)	Nri Lineage head	70+
Nwani	Nise	Lineage head	70+
Alekwe	Agulu (Ana)	Lineage head	75+
Oguda	Nsukka (Asadu)	Lineage head	70+
Eze Okpaka	Nsukka (Ehalumona)	Lineage head	70+
P. Okeke	Nnewi (Isu)	Lineage head	70+
Ekumfe	Onitsha (Ogboli)	Lineage head	70+
Obi Mgbodo*	Ibusa (Ogboli)	Lineage head	70+
J. Mordi	Ogwasbi-Ukwu	Chief	65+
Odu Egbo	Issele-Ukwu	Chief	70+
Adaigbe	Agbonta	Lineage head	75+
Iduwe*	Aghor Obi	Chief	70+
Onuora	Nkwerre (Ogboli)	Lineage head	65+
Achilonu	Mbaise (Ahiaara)	Lineage head	65+
Aguna	Enugu-ukwu	Chief	55+

## Some Principal Women Informants

Tabansi (Eze Nri's wife)	(Agbadana) Nri
Oyilidi Anadozie	(Agbadana) Nri
Ayamuagu*	(Uruofolo) Nri
Mrs. Akunne*	(Obeagu) Nri
Nwaefi	(Obeagu) Nri
Nwagbo	
Mrs. Anumba	(Obeagu) Nri

## Note:

1. This is not a complete list of my informants. Those given in this list were those interviewed at least twice for about two hours. Those interviewed for very short periods are not given.
2. My principal informants are marked with a single asterisk. They worked very closely with me for a year or more.
3. Women informants were few, because they were very cautious about talking too much.

# Appendix 5 Igbo-Ugwu Radiocarbon Dates

Laboratory Number	Provenance	Radiocarbon Age Half-Life 5568	Radiocarbon Age Half-Life 5730	Range in Years A.D.	Dendrochronologically Corrected
I-2008	Wood from stool Igbo Richard	1100 $\pm$ 120	1133 $\pm$ 120	700 - 940	730 - 1000
Hv-1514	Pit VI Igbo Jonah	1075 $\pm$ 130	1107 $\pm$ 130	710 - 970	770 - 1030
Hv-1515	Pit IV Igbo Jonah 1.38-1.68m	1110 $\pm$ 110	1143 $\pm$ 110	700 - 920	730 - 1000
Hv-1516	Pit IV Igbo Jonah 1.52-1.68m	505 $\pm$ 70	520 $\pm$ 70	1350 - 1500	1350 - 1430
I-1784	Pit IV Igbo Jonah 1.6-2.9m	1110 $\pm$ 145	1143 $\pm$ 145	660 - 950	700 - 1020

Dendrochronological corrections based on the tables published in *Masca Newsletter* 9(1): 1-20. Compiled by Professor Thurstan Shaw.

## Appendix 6 The Present and Past Nri Progress Union Executive Members

Names	Office Held	From	To	Number of Years
Late J.B.N. Onyesoh*	President General	2/1/47	30/12/54	7 years
Late J.B.N. Onyesoh	Patron	30/12/54	24/1/71	17 years
Late N.N. Eneanya*	Vice-President	2/1/47	30/12/54	7 years
Late P.I. Omambala*	Treasurer	30/12/54	5/10/55	10 months
S.O. Nwagbo	Temporary Secretary	29/12/64	31/12/45	3 days
S.O. Nwagbo	Member	12/12/64	To date	9 years
Late G.E. Okafor	Auditor	30/12/57	3/1/61	4 years
Late M.C. Okechukwu	Vice-President	30/12/57	3/1/61	4 years
G.W. Okonkwo	General Secretary	2/1/47	2/1/52	5 years
Venerable S.O. Egolum	Assistant Secretary	2/1/47	29/12/47	1 year
Venerable S.O. Egolum	Auditor	2/1/52	30/12/57	5 years
D.O. Oraeki*	Treasurer	2/1/47	30/12/54	7 years
D.O. Oraeki	Member	20/11/71	To date	2 years
S.U. Okafor	Financial Secretary	2/1/47	30/12/57	10 years
J.E. Aguolu*	Auditor	2/1/47	2/1/52	5 years
J.E. Aguolu	Treasurer	30/12/57	3/1/61	4 years
J.E. Aguolu	Patron	29/1/72	To date	18 months
Late E.O. Obi	Provost	2/1/47	30/12/54	7 years
R.I. Onuorah*	Assistant Secretary	29/1/47	2/1/52	5 years
R.I. Onuorah	General Secretary	2/1/52	30/12/54	2 years
R.I. Onuorah	Vice-President	3/1/61	To date	12 years
Canon J.E. Ikejiani*	President General	30/12/54	30/12/57	3 years
Canon J.E. Ikejiani	Patron	30/12/57	To date	16 years
Chief M.O. Mbolu*	Vice President	30/12/54	30/12/57	3 years
Chief M.O. Mbolu	President General	30/12/57	To date	16 years
I. Ileani*	General Secretary	30/12/54	To date	19 years
H.O. Nwankwo	Assistant Secretary	30/12/54	3/1/61	7 years
I.O. Okonkwo	Assistant Secretary	3/1/61	To date	12 years
Madunabo Okoye, D. Okafor and C.O. Obidike	Provosts	30/12/54	30/12/57	3 years
Late J.O. Onwubuya	Auditor	30/12/54	3/1/61	7 years
Abel Okafor	Circulator	30/12/54	30/12/57	3 years
O.N. Moneme	Financial Secretary	30/12/57	3/1/61	4 years
H.T.U. Nnoli*	Councillor	30/12/57	3/1/61	4 years

# Appendix 6 (Continued)

Names	Office Held	From	To	Number of Years
H.T.U. Nnoli	Member	3/1/61	To date	12 years
S.O. Nri*	Councillor	30/12/57	3/1/61	4 years
S.O. Nri	Member			
C.O. Obidike	Circulator	30/12/57	To date	16 years
Osita Ikeke, Godfrey Okafor,	Provosts	30/12/57	To date	16 years
C.N. Obele, A.N. Obga and Nwoye Okeye - Atu				
E.O. Okonkwo	Treasurer	3/1/61	To date	12 years
D.O. Ifezue*	Financial Secretary	3/1/61	9/1/71	
D.O. Ifezue	Co-opted member	2/1/73	To date	6 months
C.O. Amaechina and S.U. Okafor	Joint Auditors	3/1/61	To date	12 years
J.O. Igwenagu	Councillor	25/2/67	To date	6 years
G.A.D. Tabansi*	Publicity Secretary	3/1/58	To date	15 years
G.A. Onuorah*	Member	1/12/63	To date	10 years
G.C. Obidike	Member	3/1/61	To date	12 years
P.O. Abana	Member	3/1/58	To date	15 years
E.I. Abana	Member	26/12/58	To date	15 years
Joseph Nwankugwu	Member	3/1/61	To date	12 years
Anumba Obienyem	Member	3/1/61	To date	12 years
Beniah Okafor	Member	3/1/58	To date	15 years
Sylvester Ndulika	Member	3/1/58	To date	15 years
Vincent Ifgon	Member	1/12/63	To date	10 years
R.N. Tabansi*	Member	5/11/67	To date	6 years
Okika Okonkwo	Member	4/2/67	To date	6 years
Okonkwo Okezie	Member			
Ignatius Idemilika	Member	25/4/71	To date	2 years
Fabine Okonkwo	Member	24/10/71	To date	2 years
I.N. Igidi*	Co-opted member	27/9/70	To date	3 years
Ofozoba Obidigbo	Member	27/2/72	To date	17 months
D.C. Nwosu*	Co-opted member	5/1/73	To date	6 months
B.C. Nwike	Co-opted member	5/1/73	To date	6 months
I.O. Ikeagu*	Co-opted member	5/1/73	To date	6 months
F.N. Tabansi	Co-opted member	27/1/73	To date	6 months
J.N. Odumodu*	Co-opted member	23/2/73	To date	5 months

Note: This was compiled and published by the NPU Secretariat, Nri, 1973.

I have cross-checked those marked with an asterisk and found them reasonably correct.



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This book analyses the political organization of Nri, based on five years intensive field study.

The setting is the Igbo culture area, where lineages of Nri origin still exist in some of the Igbo settlements scattered over an area of about 4,500 square miles east and west of the River Niger, mostly in the north. The Nri migrated from Aguleri in about the ninth century A.D. and founded Nri town. There a state system centred on divine kingship – the Eze Nri – super-imposed on patrilineages, was developed and maintained for over a thousand years, covering the reigns of fifteen kings. The last of these, Nrijofo II, was crowned in 1937.

The author records the development of the Nri state system, and analyses in detail its political and social organization. He also deals, in the latter part of the book, with the inevitable evolution towards a 'modern' state.

Besides analysing a unique socio-political system, the author has made here a valuable ethnographic study.

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